

THE ROLE OF THE FRONTIER INDIAN AGENT:

JOSEPH MONTFORT STREET, 1827-1840

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by

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THE ROLE OF THE FRONTIER INDIAN AGENT:  
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An abstract of a Thesis by  
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The problem. The role of the frontier Indian agent is not always adequately understood. Acting as an intermediary between the federal government and the Indians, the agent's position was unique. Joseph Montfort Street was an Indian agent from 1827 to 1840. An examination of Street's unusually long tenure as an agent, thirteen years, will shed considerable light on the frontier agents' position, the role he played in frontier Indian affairs, and provide a highly informative picture of Street himself.

Procedure. Using secondary sources as an initial groundwork, the vast majority of the research involved dealt with primary materials. These were nearly completely composed of National Archives microfilm records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs for the years 1827-1840. Other primary sources were employed to supplement those microfilm sources.

Conclusions. Joseph Montfort Street was an honest and dedicated Indian agent who wrestled with white antipathy to the Indians, governmental misdirection, nebulous Indian laws, and the unscrupulous graspings of white fur traders to aid the Indians under his charge. Street believed that only Indian removal from uncomfortable proximity to whites, combined with education and agricultural instruction, would save the Indians from extinction. Street's pro-Indian attitude created white antagonism towards him, but he tirelessly labored to better the Indian's lot, and earned the trust and respect of the Indians.

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*Jos. M. Street*

Figure 1. Joseph Montfort Street.

Reprinted from William B. Street, "General Joseph M. Street,"  
Annals of Iowa, Third Series, II, (1895), p. 81.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

A host of problems confronted the United States at its inception under the Constitution in 1789. Those problems were as varied as they were complex, and cut across the broad spectrum of American society in every conceivable area. One of the more apparent, and decidedly pressing problems, was that of the Indian.

From the first permanent settlement in America early in the seventeenth century, the same question was asked time and again: What was to be done with the Indians? At the founding of the United States, recurring Indian wars, combined with a general friction between the westward advancing white population and the slowly retreating Indian population, had nearly acted to halt that same expansion inland from the Atlantic seacoast. The fledgling government met the difficulty by constant, and often haphazard, improvisation. Understandably, the result was a loose, semi-legal system of relations carried on with Indian tribes which could be best described as confused. No real order, cohesion, or direction was discernible in the melieu. Laws were enacted by Congress late in the eighteenth, and early in the nineteenth centuries in an attempt to cope with the problem. Such laws were often designed to acquire territory from the Indians for white settlement and expansion, while at the same time

supposedly guaranteeing the sovereignty of basic Indian rights which would enable them to pursue their traditional modes of life. The inherent contradiction of the separate elements often led to serious confusion and confrontation on both sides.

Within that tenuous legal framework was created the position of the Indian agent. Dealing with the Indian on the frontier was the agent's overall responsibility. His official duties were performed under the auspices of the Bureau of Indian Affairs which was created for just that purpose and placed under the War Department and its Secretary. Many times the agent occupied a post far removed from the official policy-making center of Washington City (later Washington, District of Columbia). That was a distinct disadvantage to the agent in that effective enforcement of policy suffered due to extensive delays, poor communications, and governmental incompetence. Too often the Indian agent found the solution to a problem delayed for months on account of factors like geographic liabilities and postal irregularities.

And if domestic and logistical stumbling blocks were not sufficiently potent to hinder the agent's performance, prevailing attitudes among whites in relationship to the Indians were additional and formidable obstacles with which the agent was compelled to deal. Settlement, growth, and westward expansion were the bywords of the 1820's, 1830's,



and 1840's. Consequently, the Indians experienced unrelenting white pressure which, although checked for a time by savage resistance, continued unabated upon their lands and their lives. Regardless of either morality or federal statute to the contrary, the expansion-minded American of the period was determined to wander wherever he felt the urge to go, even if that same drive resulted in the loss of Indian tribal lands, Indian rights, or Indian lives. The Indian and his culture, lifestyle, and in fact, his very presence, were viewed simultaneously merely as a hindrance to the fulfillment of a divine plan of greatness awaiting the nation. Consequently, injustices perpetrated upon the Indians were looked upon with indifference by whites. Expediency became the watchword for an expanding American where the demoralization, subjugation, and extinction of the Indians was of little consequence.

Installed as a theoretical bulwark against those prevailing beliefs was the Indian agent. Among his varied duties, the preservation of the Indian tribes by the enforcement of protective federal legislation was of signal importance. In short, the Indian agent acted as a middleman between governmental policy on the one hand, and the Indians inhabiting frontier regions on the other. Unfortunately, the agent was oftentimes unable to accomplish the positive ends with which he was charged. White American society was simply unsympathetic to the situation in which the Indian population

found itself. Indians were inexorably pushed farther and farther westward by the encroachment of white settlers until by the second quarter of the nineteenth century, they found themselves backed up against the Mississippi River itself.

In addition to the pioneer farmers, another group on the frontier, the fur traders, exerted a disruptive influence upon federal-Indian relationships. In the vanguard of westward movement, the fur traders exchanged goods on credit for the promise of payment in furs by the Indians. Fur traders became an integral, and in a broad sense essential, part of the frontier. This group, too, frequently operated at cross-purposes to the activities and duties of the agent. Their motivation was of a purely selfish nature. Desiring to maintain the Indian as a nomadic hunter in order to insure a continuous supply of furs, the traders utilized every conceivable device to effect that end. One of their most effective (and destructive) devices was liquor. The result was the continued exploitation of the Indian brought about by his inability to hold liquor, while at the same time unable to resist the damning urge to imbibe. The maintenance of the Indian as a hunter and trapper, spurred on by the pressing need to satisfy his credit accounts, was almost guaranteed.

The press of white civilization and the exploitative nature of the fur trader functioned as irritants on the frontier. By no means a complete roster of problem areas



facing the agent, they nevertheless presented the most serious challenge to his effectiveness. Therefore, it was hardly surprising to find a lack of concern and dedication on the part of some agents. Frequently political appointees or merely those filling the position to collect a salary, the Indian agent in many cases had the reputation of being dishonest, unscrupulous, or both. In some instances, he was clandestinely employed by a fur company. Promoting the interests of the company through a position of public trust did little to enhance the agent's effectiveness or credibility. The American Fur Company was a gigantic concern which enjoyed a complete monopoly of the fur trade after the mid-1820's, especially in the Mississippi Valley region. Exercising vast influence augmented by collaborating agents, the American Fur Company controlled the fur trade through a usurious credit system which kept the Indians dependent upon credit for survival, almost constantly on the hunt, and permanently in debt.

Notable exceptions to the dishonesty among Indian agents did occur, however. A conscientious and dedicated group of agents sought to transform the Indians into "civilized" farmers and mechanics and endeavored to break the stranglehold of such vested interests as the American Fur Company over the Indians. One of those men, Joseph Montfort Street, was noted for his singular honesty and sincere efforts to ameliorate the harsh situation which engulfed the Indians.

First as a Winnebago Indian agent, and later as a Sac and Fox Indian agent, Street labored through the years from 1827 to 1840 to improve the lot of Indians under his supervision. Although hampered by governmental misdirection, white animosity, and the entrenched interests of the American Fur Company, Street consistently acted in the best interests (as he defined them) of the Indians.

A close scrutiny of the period will reveal the prevailing frontier forces and conditions that influenced Street's effectiveness as an agent. Such an inquiry will hopefully increase understanding of the complexities of the Indian problem and the difficult role of the Indian agent. Viewed within the overall context of Street's position, the problems he faced, and his relationship to the Indians, the period and Street's representative role as an Indian agent will assume greater clarity.

The secondary sources used were generally of a supplementary nature (with the exception of Chapter I), and served to augment the bulk of primary sources utilized. Articles in periodicals were employed, but were limited as to scope and content. The majority of the secondary sources used were found in the Drake University Library, with others acquired through Inter-Library Loan.

Basically, the bulk of the sources used were primary sources, and consisted of microfilm records. Augmenting those records were non-microfilm sources utilized at the Iowa

State Department of History and Archives, Des Moines, Iowa. Those consisted of the Joseph Montfort Street Letterbook, as well as other uncollected documents. Most of the primary sources were Bureau of Indian Affairs records covering the years 1827-1840. Those microfilm records of the original documents held by the National Archives in Washington, D.C., were secured through the National Archives regional depository in Kansas City, Missouri, and included letters both to, and from, Street, and other individuals as well. Letters sent from Washington (Series M21) were indexed and each roll contained in the neighborhood of 400 pieces of information. The letters received (Series M23<sup>4</sup>) were indexed on other rolls, but were quite often misarranged chronologically. Each roll had to be individually inspected, piece by piece, to assure that no pertinent information would be overlooked. Those rolls each contained approximately 900-1200 pieces of information. However, the depth and value of the primary information obtained made the search extremely worthwhile.

## CHAPTER II

### FEDERAL INDIAN POLICY, 1789-1834

Congress enacted a wide variety of legislation between 1789 and 1834 to regulate Indian affairs. That legislation was only thinly rooted in British colonial antecedents. Regulation of Indian affairs in pre-Revolutionary War America was inadequate and generally a complete failure. Licensing of traders was its major feature, one which procured neither reputable traders nor effective Indian protection. Closer examination of post-Revolutionary War laws reveals basic weaknesses such as lack of authority and confusion in policy-making. Congress rectified those weaknesses in 1834 when the Bureau of Indian Affairs (B.I.A.) came into existence.

The Act of August 7, 1789, created the War Department, marks the first step in the development of federal machinery to administer Indian affairs. The law placed the regulation and maintenance of Indian affairs under War Department jurisdiction, simply for lack of a more fitting placement.<sup>1</sup> The Bureau created was called the Office of Indian Affairs (O.I.A.) until 1824, when the designation was changed to Bureau of

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<sup>1</sup>Laurence F. Schmeckebier, The Office of Indian Affairs; Its History, Activities, and Organization (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1927), p. 26.

Indian Affairs, a change legalized by statute in 1834.<sup>2</sup>

Congress passed several laws during the last decade of the eighteenth century governing Indian relations. The Act of July 22, 1790, called the Trade and Intercourse Act of July 22, 1790, was grounded in the Constitutional provision that Congress possessed "...the power to regulate commerce...with the Indian tribes."<sup>3</sup> The law provided for regulation of the Indian trade, and included provisions protecting the sovereignty of Indian lands and guaranteeing prosecution of those who committed crimes against Indians, particularly white men accused of trespassing on Indian lands.<sup>4</sup>

On March 1, 1793, Congress enacted the Second Intercourse Act. It added few new provisions to the Act of 1790, but prohibited settlement on Indian lands, granted authority to the president to remove intruders from Indian lands, and forbade any governmental employee engaged in Indian affairs from having "...any interest or concern in any trade with the Indians."<sup>5</sup> One major addition empowered the president "...to

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<sup>2</sup>Schmeckebier, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>3</sup>Felix S. Cohen, Handbook of Federal Indian Law (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1942), p. 69.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 70.



appoint such persons, from time to time, as temporary agents, to reside among the Indians, as he shall think proper."<sup>6</sup> Eventually, the Indian agent was appointed on a permanent basis as temporary labels were dropped. Included among the second act's provisions were general guidelines for the agent's duties. Agents were impressed with the need for civilizing Indians through agriculture and "mechanic arts" like blacksmithing and carpentry. Other, more general, instructions called upon the agent to maintain the confidence of the Indians, thereby keeping them attached to the United States and impressed with the government's firm desire to maintain peace and justice. Beyond those general instructions the agent, under the supervision of his respective territorial governor, was charged with responsibility for reporting conditions among the Indians, happenings at his agency, and progress made towards civilization of the Indians.<sup>7</sup>

After 1800, Congress enacted more far-reaching legislation to deal with Indian relations, but the nebulous authority of the O.I.A. was of such a quasi-legal nature that it wielded little power. Relegated as it was under War Department authority, the O.I.A. possessed legislated powers, but

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<sup>6</sup>Francis Paul Prucha, American Indian Policy in the Formulative Years (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), pp. 53-54.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

lacked meaningful enforcement machinery. Therefore, actual dealings with the Indians fell to the agent. Success or failure rested heavily upon his character, the respect he won from the tribes with whom he lived, and such authority as his position held in the eyes of white men on the frontier.<sup>8</sup> Instructions sent to agents in 1802 detailed a comprehensive and idealistic statement of the agent's role:

The motives of the Government for sending agents to reside with the Indian Nations, are the cultivation of peace and harmony between the U.States, and the Indian Nations generally; the detection of any improper conduct in the Indians, or the citizens of the U.States, or others relating to the Indians, or their lands, and the introduction of the Arts of Husbandry and domestic manufactures, as well as providing, and diffusing the blessings attached to a well-regulated society.<sup>9</sup>

That statement represented optimistic hopes for Indian civilization and provided a sweeping view of the agent's responsibilities.

Congress created the Office of Superintendent of Indian Trade on April 21, 1806. Ostensibly formed to oversee the "factory system", the Secretary of War depended increasingly on that office as the scope of Indian regulation broadened. The factory system harked back to the Revolutionary War period, and reflected a desire on the government's part to undertake increased control of all aspects of Indian affairs.

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<sup>8</sup>Prucha, op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

Through the factory system, the government purchased finished goods, transported them to the frontier, and controlled their sale to the Indians to prevent dishonest traders from bilking furs from the Indians at unfair prices. While he had no official power to act in Indian affairs, the Superintendent of Indian Trade became the unofficial focus of Indian relations.<sup>10</sup> Thomas L. McKenney, destined to head the future Bureau of Indian Affairs, represented a notable holder of that office. A man deeply concerned with improving conditions among Indians, McKenney served as superintendent from 1816 until 1822, when the post was abolished.

Congress formulated the garrison, or outpost, system early in the nineteenth century. Military outposts were constructed, and their commanders were instructed, to assist Indian agents at frontier agencies. The War Department outlined cooperation between the agent and military by directives; military forces aided the agent in enforcing treaties, protecting the sovereignty of Indian lands and lives, and in general, serving in a supportive capacity as to the performance of the agent's official duties. Jealousy sometimes flared due to conflicts of authority. Army officers were often sensitive about taking orders from civilian Indian agents. In general, military commanders enforced Indian

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<sup>10</sup>Prucha, op. cit., p. 56.

policy in conjunction with the agent, and were capable, ardent supporters of governmental policy.<sup>11</sup>

By 1824, ambiguity surrounding O.I.A. powers, position, and function gave rise to a welter of confusion. Secretary of War John C. Calhoun attempted to solve the complicated situation. On March 11, 1824, Calhoun created the Bureau of Indian Affairs at his own instigation (without Congressional sanction) to handle Indian affairs, and Congress appointed Thomas L. McKenney superintendent of that new bureau. As head of the B.I.A., Congress charged McKenney with responsibility for appropriations of annuities and current expenses, examination and approval of all vouchers for expenditures by agents, administering funds for Indian civilization, deciding on claims between whites and Indians, and handling all ordinary correspondence of the War Department.<sup>12</sup> McKenney undertook his new position with enthusiasm. In a report to Calhoun in 1825, pertaining to Indians who had voluntarily given up claims to tribal lands by treaty and elected to move, McKenney stated it was "...the policy of the Government to guarantee to them lasting and undisturbed possession" of their new lands west of the Mississippi River. McKenney felt the benefits of increased Indian education

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<sup>11</sup>Prucha, op. cit., pp. 61-65.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 57-58.

would be substantial. He viewed returning Indian students as necessary intermediaries between savagery and civilization.<sup>13</sup>

McKenney's enthusiasm was short-lived. He discovered that the B.I.A. was delegated all work involved in administering Indian affairs, but lacked actual power to act as an official agency. Because of its status as a War Department subsidiary, the B.I.A.'s effectiveness was sharply limited. Prompted by that discovery, McKenney conceived a bill advocating a strong, revamped B.I.A. and submitted it to Congress on March 31, 1826. Attempts to move the bill out of committee failed due to meagre support, and it died. Many of McKenney's proposals would be included in a significant report submitted several years later in 1829, which laid the foundation for the B.I.A.'s eventual reorganization in 1834.<sup>14</sup>

Before the frustrated McKenney resigned his position in 1830, he realized the Bureau of Indian Affairs lacked concrete policy and basic coordination. Secretary of War Peter Porter concurred. Porter wrote in 1828, expressing his views on Indian affairs:

The policy of the government on the subject of its Indian relations, as indicated by our various treaties with that people, and by the laws regulating our intercourse with them, has never been

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<sup>13</sup>Cohen, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>14</sup>Prucha, op. cit., pp. 58-59.

very distinctly marked; nor, indeed has it at different times been very uniform or consistent in its character. The regulations, too, of the Department, so far as it may be said to have any, have been equally undefined and vacillating; and there appears to have been scarcely any other rule to guide the officers, and the agents in the discharge of their functions--particularly to the disbursement and application of the contingent fund--than their own several notions of justice and policy.<sup>15</sup>

Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, himself an Indian agent, colorfully described the situation:

The derangements in the fiscal affairs of the Indian department are in the extreme. One would think that appropriations had been handled with a pitchfork. A correspondent writes: "For 1827 we were promised \$48,000 and received \$30,000. For 1828 we were promised \$40,000 and have received \$25,000...It is impossible that this can continue." And these derangements are only with regard to the north. How the south and west stand it is impossible to say. But there is a screw loose in the public machinery somewhere.<sup>16</sup>

A collective, coherent policy was needed to institute order in Indian affairs. Andrew Jackson and Indian removal initiated a move to satisfy those requisites.

The policy of removal, whereby Indians exchanged tribal lands within the United States for lands west of the Mississippi, was not unique to Jackson. Removal had originated with Thomas Jefferson in 1803, when the addition of the vast Louisiana Territory created conditions that made removal

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<sup>15</sup>Prucha, op. cit., p. 250.

<sup>16</sup>Schmeckebier, loc. cit.

feasible.<sup>17</sup> Removal surfaced during James Monroe's administration following the War of 1812. By the 1820's, several Southern tribes, notably the Cherokee, had begun to adopt white customs and society. However, their attempts to establish an independent nation within the United States brought them into sharp conflict with the state of Georgia. Since the federal government had failed to extinguish Indian land claims in Georgia (as per agreements reached in an April 24, 1802 compact between the United States and Georgia<sup>18</sup>), the Georgia legislature decreed on December 20, 1828, that all Indian residents would come under its jurisdiction within six months. John Quincy Adams' administration refused to interfere in the matter. Instead, Adams advocated moving tribes west of the Mississippi in exchange for lands of the Eastern Indians.<sup>19</sup> Those new lands were to be located west of Missouri and Arkansas on the Mississippi's west bank.<sup>20</sup> Adams favored negotiations which would have respected tribal rights to ratify or refuse to sign treaties, a position viewed as too lenient by Southerners.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Prucha, op. cit., p. 226.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>19</sup>Ronald N. Satz, "Federal Indian Policy, 1829-1849" (unpublished Doctor's dissertation, University of Maryland, 1972), p. 8.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 9-10.

Andrew Jackson's election to the presidency in 1828 added impetus to removal and devolved a more coherent, workable plan to effect it. Jackson was not an "Indian-hater". Rather, he was deeply concerned with national growth, unity, and security. Jackson believed the Indian held merely a possessory right to their lands, and were subject to American sovereignty. Viewing the treaty-making process as absurd, Jackson favored a policy which forced Indians to emigrate outside the United States' boundaries. In return, Indian tribes would receive tracts in the trans-Mississippi west.<sup>22</sup> Adams' plan had been basically the same. Jackson additionally urged individual allotments for Indians who remained in the East and became citizens of their respective states. He believed only well-educated and property-minded Indians would elect to follow that course, however, and the numbers would be small.<sup>23</sup> Jackson felt removal would be of great benefit to the Indians; removal was not a dishonest attempt to cheat Indians, as preservation of their rights occurred throughout the entire process. Jackson stated in his first inaugural address in 1829 that:

...it will be my sincere and constant desire to observe towards the Indian tribes within our limits a just and liberal policy, and give that humane and considerate attention to their rights and their

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<sup>22</sup>Satz, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.



wants which is consistent with the habits of our Government and the wishes of our people.<sup>24</sup>

Jackson's seeming indifference to the Indian's plight, notwithstanding his public declarations, combined with a general Indian refusal to vacate their homelands, and led to his acrimonious denunciation by religious and humanitarian groups. Congregationalists strongly protested against sending Indians into the supposed "Great American Desert" of the trans-Mississippi region; they fervently believed Indians would perish in that "wasteland". Moreover, political opposition to Jackson found expedient expression in removal debates. Anti-Jackson National Republicans railed against Jackson's alleged cruelty, charging that he had failed to uphold guaranteed Indian rights.<sup>25</sup>

Misdirection and mistrust of Jackson's removal policy painfully accentuated the need for a comprehensive, acceptable Indian policy. While removal established broad, general guidelines, effective machinery for day-to-day enforcement was inadequate. Congress took a faltering step to correct the situation and systematize Indian affairs by the Act of July 9, 1832, which established the post of Commissioner of Indian Affairs. The law empowered the president to appoint a commissioner (under the Secretary of War), who was

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<sup>24</sup>Satz, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 34-37.

entrusted with "...the direction and management of all Indian affairs, and of all matters arising out of Indian relations."<sup>26</sup> The law also invested the president with the power to discontinue agencies, along with accompanying agents, subagents, and interpreters, for reason of Indian emigration, or any other cause.<sup>27</sup>

While national attention shifted to the nullification crisis with South Carolina during the winter of 1832-1833, confusion and indirection continued to plague the B.I.A. In 1834, Congress enacted two important pieces of legislation which increased governmental control of the Indian trade, broadened the scope of the agent's authority, and formally established the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Congress established the B.I.A. on a legally constituted basis, a marked departure from its former quasi-legal, "after-thought" status. A report compiled and submitted to Congress in 1829 had laid the groundwork for the 1834 laws. William Clark and Lewis Cass, two men well-acquainted with the broad spectrum of Indian relations, composed the report at the behest of incoming Secretary of War Peter Porter, who in 1828 had remarked about his new appointment:

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<sup>26</sup>Prucha, op. cit., pp. 58-59.

<sup>27</sup>Cohen, op. cit., p. 73.

...I have found no portion of its extensive and complicated duties so perplexing, and the performance of which has been less welcome, than those which appertain to the Bureau of Indian Affairs.<sup>28</sup>

Clark and Cass responded energetically. They submitted a bill which incorporated older Indian laws, as well as several innovative ideas designed to alleviate the B.I.A.'s hodge-podge composition. The new concepts related to the agent and his duties, giving him broader powers and increased discretion to handle frontier Indian relations.<sup>29</sup> Disappointment was Clark's and Cass' reward for their efforts. Congress ignored the bill and it died, only to resurface in 1834.

Congressional attention was again drawn to Indian affairs by a full-scale report submitted by the House Committee on Indian Affairs on May 20, 1834. The committee called for a complete reorganization of Indian affairs and a restatement of Indian policy.<sup>30</sup> In general, the report, and accompanying legislation, provided for a reorganized Indian department, a new trade and intercourse act, and the organization of a western territory for displaced Indians.

Frustration marked the committee's labors; indeed, its report to Congress succinctly outlined the staggering difficulties encountered in rationally handling Indian

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<sup>28</sup>Prucha, op. cit., p. 252.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., pp. 253-254.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., pp. 250-251.

relations:

The committee has sought, in vain, for any lawful authority for the appointment of a majority of the agents and subagents of Indian affairs now in office. For years, usage, rendered colorably lawful only by reference to indirect and equivocal legislation, has been the only sanction for their appointment. Our Indian relations commenced at an early period of the revolutionary war. What was necessary to be done, either for defence or conciliation, was done; and being necessary, no inquiry seems to have been made as to the authority under which it was done.<sup>31</sup>

On June 30, 1834, Congress enacted two bills. The first, called the Trade and Intercourse Act of June 30, 1834, relied heavily upon the 1829 proposals of Clark and Cass. Basically a measure to regulate Indian trade, the law gave individual agents expressed powers and substantially broadened their authority. Agents were empowered to issue licenses to traders, while retaining the right to refuse issuance of the same:

...if he is satisfied that the applicant is a person of bad character, or that it would be improper to permit him to reside in the Indian country, or if a license, previously granted to such applicant, has been revoked or a forfeiture of his bond decreed.<sup>32</sup>

Violators of trade regulations were subject to forfeiture of bond, fines, and loss of all trading goods.<sup>33</sup> Inequities within the fur trade were recognized. Unfair practices by

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<sup>31</sup>Prucha, op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 262.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 262-263.

fur traders resulted in stricter licensing because the "...Indians do not meet traders on equal terms, and no doubt have much reason to complain of fraud and imposition."<sup>34</sup>

The accused party could appeal the decision, and the Indian agent bore the burden of proof.<sup>35</sup> The act prohibited hunting or trapping by whites on Indian lands, prevent livestock grazing on those lands, and prevent illegal settlement on Indian lands.<sup>36</sup> Violators were not subject to punishment other than fines, a point which demonstrated apparent Congressional unwillingness to safeguard Indian rights by more forceful measures. Local military forces shouldered responsibility for the act's enforcement. They were ordered to act in conjunction with the agent to uphold Indian rights.<sup>37</sup>

The second measure dealt with the B.I.A.'s organization and functions, finally bestowing upon the bureau legislative sanction where before it had existed of "doubtful origin and authority."<sup>38</sup> By establishing a permanent agency to deal with Indian affairs, Congress transformed the B.I.A.'s

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<sup>34</sup>Cohen, loc. cit.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Prucha, op. cit., pp. 263-264.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., pp. 265-269.

<sup>38</sup>Cohen, op. cit., p. 74.

non-official, quasi-legal status; a viable agency designed to perform an essential task was formed. The second act of June 30, 1834, delegated actual authority to the B.I.A. Not only did it regularize the B.I.A.'s internal activities, but gave it authority to determine and enforce Indian policy. The acts reduced confusion surrounding the B.I.A.'s nebulous character. Lewis Cass, who by 1834 had been appointed Secretary of War, summarized the effects of both acts in his annual report for that year:

The acts of the last session of Congress on the subject of Indian affairs, have introduced important changes into those relations. Many of the provisions of former laws had become inappropriate or inadequate and not suited to the channel which time and circumstance had made. In the act regulating the intercourse with the various tribes, the principles of intercommunication with them are laid down, and the necessary details provided.<sup>39</sup>

By 1834, the groundwork for a revamped Bureau of Indian Affairs was laid. The B.I.A.'s after-thought complexion was supplanted by a regularized organization sanctioned by federal statute, resulting in a strengthened Indian policy. However, the agent's problems were not totally solved by improved legislation. He continued to experience difficulties which, while not as severe as before, still presented formidable challenges.

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<sup>39</sup>Prucha, op. cit., p. 250.

### CHAPTER III

#### PRAIRIE DU CHIEN, 1827-1832

One Indian agent appointed during the 1820's was Joseph Montfort Street. Appointed by John Quincy Adams in August, 1827, Street became the Winnebago Indian agent at Prairie du Chien near the fork of the Wisconsin and Mississippi Rivers. Prairie du Chien was far-removed from Lunenburg County, Virginia, where Street was born on December 18, 1782, the son of a prosperous farmer. As a young man, Street moved to Richmond where he entered a commercial establishment. While in Richmond, Street became acquainted with one John Woods. Following Street's study of law under Henry Clay in Kentucky, Woods and Street published the newspaper Western World in Frankfort, Kentucky, beginning publication in July, 1806.<sup>1</sup> Allegations in the Western World against Aaron Burr and his questionable western intrigues forced Burr to appear before a grand jury twice in 1806.<sup>2</sup> Attacks on other prominent Kentuckians led to incidents involving both Woods and Street, the latter fighting several duels over Western World charges. Local pressure and a

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<sup>1</sup>"Joseph Montfort Street," National Cyclopedia of American Biography, XIII, 56.

<sup>2</sup>Katherine Elizabeth Crane, "Joseph Montfort Street," DAB, XVIII, 136.

falling-out with Woods combined to force the newspaper and Street out of business in 1807. Married in 1809, he migrated to Shawneetown, Illinois, in 1812 with his wife and the first of their fourteen children.<sup>3</sup> At Shawneetown, Street became a local leader, holding at various times the positions of clerk of court, postmaster, and brigadier-general in the local militia.<sup>4</sup> The last position resulted in his being called "General" Street for the rest of his life. It was while Street was a resident of Shawneetown that Adams, at Clay's recommendation, appointed him Indian agent at Prairie du Chien.

Street received his appointment on August 8, 1827. War Department instructions ordered him to proceed immediately to Prairie du Chien and undertake his official duties there. Street was instructed to submit quarterly financial reports and post bond to guarantee the faithful discharge of his duties; his salary was set at \$1200 per annum.<sup>5</sup>

Street soon familiarized himself with agency routine and began reporting agency conditions to the War Department.

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<sup>3</sup>Crane, op. cit., p. 137.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>James Barbour to Joseph Montfort Street, August 8, 1827; Bureau of Indian Affairs; Letters Sent, 1824-1881; National Archives, Record Group 75; Series M21, Roll 4, pp. 105-106. (Hereinafter referred to as M21.)



Imbued with a "sense of mission," Street arrived at Prairie du Chien intent upon improving the Indian's lot. The Indian, Street felt, was most effectively controlled when treated justly, but firmly. It was:

...the policy of our Government, that this should be done in such ways, as at once to impress Indians with a deep sense of our kind hospitality & friendship to such as were faithful-& of our powers and resources if compelled to use them against those who were base and faithless.<sup>6</sup>

Street realized that maintaining frontier peace was an uncertain task. He stated that predicting the chances for peace was "...beyond a reasonable and prudent calculation."<sup>7</sup>

Street based his pessimistic declaration upon first-hand evidence. A primary source of Indian-white friction stemmed from whites, who, in search of lead, trespassed on Indian lands. Lead had been mined in the region for well over a hundred years and continued at the time of Street's appointment in 1827. In the summer of 1827, a party of at least eighty miners, led by Henry Dodge, entered Indian lands, determined to hold their lead claims at all costs.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Joseph Montfort Street to Secretary of War, November 15, 1827; Bureau of Indian Affairs; Letters Received, 1824-1881; National Archives, Record Group 75; Series M234, Roll 696. (Hereinafter referred to as M234.)

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Francis Paul Prucha, American Indian Policy in the Formulative Years (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), pp. 179-180.

Dodge claimed that agreements with several Indian tribes, including the Winnebago, secured his claim. However, because Dodge lacked the necessary governmental sanction, Street acted. He wrote the War Department on November 15, 1827, suggesting that the United States buy the disputed Indian lands and thus insure frontier peace. Street stated that the area had grown unsuitable for Indian habitation; inrushing torrents of miners (estimated to have numbered 2000 in 1827, and 10,000 only one year later) frightened away much of the area's game. Street hoped that purchase would produce additional benefits as "...the Indians removed from the vicinity of whites would no longer see the worst side of our character exhibited in the many adventurers flocking to the mines."<sup>10</sup> Street thus believed that the whites were primarily responsible for Indian problems in his district. Withdrawing the Indians from uncomfortable closeness to whites would advance their civilization.

Dodge and the miners refused to vacate the lead mining region. Acting under Street's orders, subagent John Marsh journeyed to the mines. Marsh reported that Dodge and his men were heavily armed and had constructed wooden fortifications; Marsh said they appeared determined to stay.

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<sup>9</sup>Street to Secretary of War, January 8, 1828; M234, Roll 696.

<sup>10</sup>Street to Secretary of War, November 15, 1827; M234, Roll 696.

Street, seeking to avoid a confrontation, gave Dodge some leeway for his actions when he said: "He is, I think, a good-man--pecuniarily unfortunate, and I suppose, making a 'bold stroke' for a fortune."<sup>11</sup> Street subsequently realized that only military force would break the stalemate. He requested 180 soldiers from the Fort Crawford garrison at Prairie du Chien in July, 1828, but received only six men as an escort. Street's meagre force proved insufficient to effect Dodge's removal, and he stayed on Indian lands. The stalemate was broken by a temporary agreement reached on August 25, 1828, later ratified by formal treaty on August 1, 1829, which extinguished Indian claims to the region. Increased numbers of whites joined the influx thereafter, permanently safeguarded by ex post facto sanction.<sup>12</sup>

Street believed that concrete action was necessary to prevent a repetition of the Dodge incident. Street summarized conditions succinctly:

Why then should we calculate that uncivilized savages, whilst dying with unger & shivering with cold, measurably caused by our invasion of their country and occupancy of their lands, will bear all in peace?<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Street to Secretary of War, January 8, 1828; M234, Roll 696.

<sup>12</sup>Prucha, op. cit., pp. 180-181.

<sup>13</sup>Street to Peter Porter, September 26, 1828; M234, Roll 696.

Indian-white friction plagued Street throughout his thirteen year tenure as an Indian agent.

Lead miners composed only one troublesome white group. Fur traders, exchanging goods such as iron, powder, traps, salt, blankets, and a myriad of related merchandise, were an integral element of the frontier scene. Street strongly dis-trusted fur traders:

...who can, with a smiling face, demoralize a whole band of Indians, for the sake of 50 or 100 musk-rat-skins, and chuckle while calculating that the whiskey thirst is maddening him, has cleared 300 percent upon the cost.<sup>14</sup>

Street's bitter accusation referred to the gigantic American Fur Company. Originating as John Jacob Astor's Southwest Company, it failed due to forced inactivity during the War of 1812. Reorganized as the American Fur Company at war's end, it merged with the Missouri Company in 1818 to form the company's nucleus. The American Fur Company absorbed smaller companies and independent traders until by the time of Astor's retirement in 1834, it enjoyed a complete monopoly of the fur trade.<sup>15</sup> That monopoly was spawned, nurtured, and maintained by a credit system established by the French fur traders in the seventeenth century, in turn

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<sup>14</sup>Street to Barbour, January 8, 1828; M234, Roll 696.

<sup>15</sup>Ida M. Street, "Joseph Street's Last Fight with the Fur Traders," Annals of Iowa, Third Series, XVII (1929), p. 108.

developed and improved by the British in the eighteenth century, and systematized by Astor and the Company in the nineteenth century. Winter hunts netted the Indians furs, pelts, and dried meat which they exchanged for manufactured "necessities". Goods purchased on credit each fall were paid for with the winter's catch the following spring. As the Indians grew more and more dependent upon credit, they sank deeper and deeper into trader's debt since the year's catch rarely paid their indebtedness on a yearly basis.<sup>16</sup>

Whiskey was common payment for furs as it was easily shipped, stored, and dispensed to the Indians. Not only was whiskey a barterable commodity, but its unsettling effects prevented Indians from embracing a sedentary, agricultural life-style. The trader, by reinforcing the nomadic ways of Indians, assured the fur trade's continuance. Whiskey's debilitating effects were recognized by the Indians themselves. Decori, a Winnebago chief, told Street in January, 1828: "My heart is sick, when I see Indians drink much whiskey. It is not good for Indians. It is not made by Indians but white men."<sup>17</sup> Another Indian remarked that "...furs and skins were given to the trader for hot-poison."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ida M. Street, op. cit., p. 108.

<sup>17</sup>Street to Barbour, January 8, 1828; M234, Roll 696.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

The anticipation of whiskey made the Indians virtual prisoners of the traders. Consequently, traders charged high, unfair prices not only because manufactured goods were unavailable elsewhere, but the promise of whiskey dulled the Indian's already weak bargaining powers. Agent Thomas Forsyth reported in 1831 that a blanket, a rifle, and one pound of shot, which together cost the trader \$21 (shipping included), collectively cost the Indian \$44, a healthy profit which exceeded 100 percent.<sup>19</sup> Profits of that magnitude were commonplace; losses suffered through uncollected debts were small in comparison. In February, 1831, agent John Kinzie pointedly described whiskey's impact on the Indians: "With the promise of a few bottles of whiskey, much can be effected."<sup>20</sup>

The liquor traffic, Street believed, was largely responsible for Indian instability. He placed the blame for the liquor traffic squarely upon the American Fur Company. Positive action against whiskey traders was difficult. Governmental policy was ineffectual in controlling the liquor traffic. Street queried the War Department in October, 1832, asking for guidelines to follow when seizing contraband

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<sup>19</sup>Jacob Van Der Zee, "Fur Trade in the Iowa Country," Iowa Journal of History and Politics, XII (1914), pp. 556-557.

<sup>20</sup>John Kinzie to Lewis Cass, February 16, 1831; M234, Roll 696.

liquor. When so informed, Street said: "You must do me the justice to believe that no official of the Government would more readily & efficiently act in any such case than myself."<sup>21</sup> Street believed that by utilizing whiskey, Company traders wreaked "great injury" upon Indians each year. Traders scoffed at governmental efforts to halt the flow of illegal liquor into Indian Territory. Street reported to the War Department that one trader declared he would import liquor regardless of governmental restrictions.<sup>22</sup>

The American Fur Company was the real exploiter, Street felt, and liquor was one way by which Indians were kept dependent upon the company. Street acknowledged the Company's tremendous power. He strenuously protested in October, 1832, against undue Company pressure which unjustly influenced treaty negotiations. On October 9, 1832, Street wrote to his immediate superior, Superintendent William Clark at St. Louis, that the situation warranted investigation: "I trust, Sir, that you will urge the Government to look into this business. 'There is something rotten in Denmark.'"<sup>23</sup> Street's intense condemnation increased throughout 1832. Company traders were persons:

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<sup>21</sup>Street to William Clark, October 9, 1832; M234, Roll 728.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

...who are by their wealth shoving all other traders out of the country-by their merchandise & whiskey gaining an influence amongst the Inds. And using that influence directly against the Government.<sup>24</sup>

Zachary Taylor, later President of the United States, commanded Fort Crawford at Prairie du Chien during part of Street's early tenure as agent; Taylor became Street's staunchest ally against Company machinations. Taylor said: "Take the American Fur Company in the aggregate, and they are the greatest set of scoundrels the world ever knew."<sup>25</sup> Like Street, Taylor's comment reflected personal prejudice. Street's antagonism continued to fester and it remained an open sore which troubled Street during his thirteen years as an Indian agent.

An incident occurred late in 1829, and dragged on through 1832, which served as a catalyst to solidify Street's burgeoning antipathy to the American Fur Company. The incident demonstrated Street's frustration in the face of white insensitivity to Indians, and the agent's awkward, intermediary position.

In December, 1829, Street learned that one Jean Brunet, a local Company trader, had left Prairie du Chien to cut

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<sup>24</sup>Street to William Clark, October 9, 1832; M234, Roll 728.

<sup>25</sup>Holman Hamilton, Zachary Taylor-Soldier of the Republic, I, (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1941), p. 115.



timber on Indian lands upstream on the Mississippi. Accompanied by Major Stephan W. Kearney, then commandant of Fort Crawford, Street "...pursued him next day in person, accompanied by a military escort, and arrested him."<sup>26</sup> Cut timber seized from Brunet was utilized in the construction of a new fort at Prairie du Chien. On February 22, 1830, Brunet brought suit against Kearney and Street. Brunet cited his "illegal" arrest and seizure of his timber as mitigating circumstances. Faced with the unwelcome prospects of a spring trial, Street remarked on February 22, 1830:

...the spring term of the Court at this place is approaching, and I have no prospect [sic] of a fair trial before the presiding Judge, from his previous course, and little hope that an impartial Jury can be procured at this place.<sup>27</sup>

James D. Doty, the presiding judge, was a man whose extensive frontier land holdings left him unsympathetic to either Indian land sovereignty or Street's predicament. Street felt any jury chosen would convict him as the local inhabitants were:

...principally of ignorant Canadian French, and mixed breed Indians, not one of 20 whom can read or write. Many of these have been hirelings to go with lumber parties, and know little about the law, and care less, so long as they are not made to feel its penalties.<sup>28</sup> Of this motley crew the Jury will be...made up.

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<sup>26</sup>Street to John Eaton, February 22, 1830; M234, Roll 696.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Prucha, op. cit., p. 184.

Postponements delayed the trial until the spring of 1832. Street and Kearney were found guilty, and a judgment of \$1411.12 was levied against them. Street reported in October, 1832, that he was forced to borrow money to settle his half of the judgment. Congress had not passed an emergency appropriations bill authorizing payment of the fine, and Brunet, earlier satisfied with a payment schedule amicable to Street's financial situation, demanded immediate payment in late September. Brunet had written to Street on September 28, 1832, arranging the payments: "The balance of the execution you can give me your note if you think proper, payable in some reasonable time, and let the execution be returned satisfied."<sup>29</sup>

Within a matter of days, Brunet totally reversed his lenient plan and ordered immediate payment by Street. Street wrote Clark on October 4, 1832, that "...Brunet issued an execution against my body, which could only be satisfied by going to jail or paying the money."<sup>30</sup> Street borrowed the necessary funds from a local merchant, John Dowling, who allowed Street two months to repay the loan.<sup>31</sup> Street

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<sup>29</sup>Jean Brunet to Street, September 28, 1832; Joseph Montfort Street Letterbook, held by the Iowa State Department of History and Archives, Des Moines, Iowa, p. 67. (hereinafter referred to as Letterbook.)

<sup>30</sup>Street to Clark, October 4, 1832; M234, Roll 728.

<sup>31</sup>Letterbook, loc. cit.

theorized why Brunet had changed his initial payment plan: "Brunet would willingly wait until I could get the money. However, it seems that Judge Doty, who was here had persuaded B. that I had intentionally neglected to get the money."<sup>32</sup> Street denied any attempt on his part to avoid payment of the judgment, but admitted that pressing agency matters (such as the Black Hawk War several months earlier) had so occupied his time that "...I had in a measure lost sight of the judgment."<sup>33</sup> On October 23, Street received War Department notice that Congress had appropriated funds to satisfy claims against Street and Kearney. The appropriation proved insufficient; Street paid nearly \$40 to cancel the judgment.<sup>34</sup>

Street's appraisal of the Brunet affair, particularly his firm conviction that Company machinations manifested a frontier menace, received additional support. In a letter written December 5, 1832, Street incredulously reported that Major Kearney's bail was posted by Joseph Rolette, the local agent of the American Fur Company, and brother-in-law of Jean Brunet.<sup>35</sup> When Kearney left Prairie du Chien on Military

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<sup>32</sup>Street to Clark, October 4, 1832; M234, Roll 728.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Cass to Street, October 23, 1832; M21, Roll 9, p. 207.

<sup>35</sup>Street to Cass, December 5, 1832; M234, Roll 728.

business, Street was left to bear the brunt of the payment difficulties alone. Street reached the conclusion that Brunet's payment turnabout and the posting of Kearney's bail later by Rolette were related incidents. The American Fur Company wielded its influence to effect Street's removal or to discredit him officially because he opposed the Company's monopolistic impulses through his efforts to ameliorate conditions among the Winnebago. Street discovered that enforcement of Indian laws was laden with pitfalls; losing the Brunet judgment convinced him of that. He complained bitterly that enforcement of the law, especially against the American Fur Company, heaped unfair hardships upon the agent:

If something more effectual is not done to protect the officers of the Government against the Cupidity of the Traders, they will be reduced to the alternative of deciding between pecuniary ruin, on the one hand, and disobedience of orders on the other.<sup>36</sup>

No doubts haunted Street on that point, however: "For my single self, I shall not begin in my age to place pecuniary means in opposition to the recognition of my country."<sup>37</sup> By 1833, the scenario for a prolonged Street-Company dispute was established. Street's anti-Company prejudice achieved mature proportions in 1833. Street wrote in October, 1832:

Whether we are making Treaties, in which the American Fur Company and its agents, are through

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<sup>36</sup>Street to Cass, December 5, 1832; M234, Roll 728.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

their connivance with the Indians drawing off large sums of money-Those agents are by every means in their power harrassing the officers of the U.S. on the frontier-striving to undermine the influence of the Govt. & its agents with the Inds. and using their influence to subvert the voices and plans of the Gov. for the amelioration & civilization of the Indians.<sup>38</sup>

Miners and traders were significant not so much in themselves, but rather for their influence upon Indian affairs. Those individual groups and their intricate, component parts, played an active and noteworthy part in Indian relations. However, Street's involvement with basic Indian affairs consumed a large portion of his time and energies. Concern for all facets of Indian life enmeshed Street deeply in those relations.

Street's correspondence relative to strictly Indian affairs began in November, 1827. At that time, Street suggested purchasing the Winnebago lead mining lands. Street early revealed his personal estimation of himself as an outgrowth of the above-mentioned purchase. Street's strong belief in his potential would later blossom into full-fledged egotism. After Street stated his opinions germane to the proposed land purchase, he added: "I confidently trust that the motives which impelled me to venture these remarks will be duly appreciated."<sup>39</sup> In that same letter, Street reported

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<sup>38</sup>Street to Clark, October 4, 1832; M234, Roll 728.

<sup>39</sup>Street to Barbour, November 15, 1827; M234, Roll 696.

approximately 900 to 1000 Winnebago warriors with the tribe, divided into three groups; one on the Rock River (which generally fell under Street's jurisdiction), another on the Fox River, and a third located north of Prairie du Chien on the Mississippi.<sup>40</sup>

The Dodge confrontation impressed upon Street the necessity of Indian removal. Street believed that white vices and low frontier morality presented poor examples for ignorant Indians. He advocated removal of the Winnebago inhabiting lands east of the Mississippi to new lands across the river on its west bank. That plan, he argued, would benefit the Winnebago, while at the same time (as an added inducement), opening up increased tracts for white settlement.<sup>41</sup> Because Street realized that white occupancy of the region was inevitable, he sought to use that fact to his advantage to garner support for his plan. Street then proposed that the United States buy a selected strip of land forty miles wide, running from the Mississippi River to the Des Moines River. One half would be acquired from the Sioux, the other half from the Sac and Fox. Street envisioned Winnebago settled there acting as a human buffer between

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<sup>40</sup>Street to Barbour, January 8, 1828; M234, Roll 696.

<sup>41</sup>Street to Eaton, February 22, 1830; M234, Roll 696.

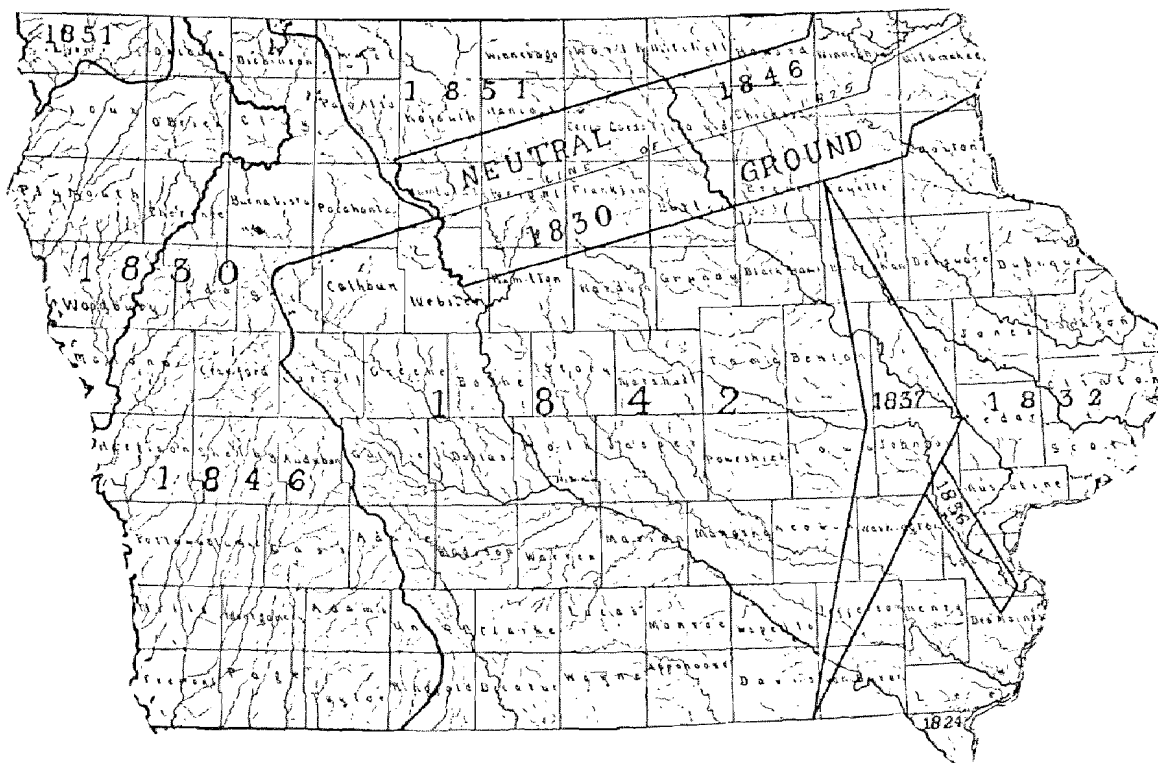


Figure 3. Indian Land Cessions in Iowa, 1824-1851.

Reprinted from Peterson, op. cit., p. 145.

those constantly warring tribes,<sup>42</sup> living in safety and protected by intermarriage with both.<sup>43</sup> Winnebago benefits would be substantial, he reasoned, on account of increased distance between the Winnebago and the whites.<sup>44</sup> Street insisted the plan was one he had projected as early as the summer of 1828. At that time, the Winnebago had exhibited a real desire to sell their lands east of the Mississippi and south of the Wisconsin Rivers. By 1830, circumstances had changed:

Now, it was said, to be a hard matter to make a purchase at all, and great credit is given to many individuals who, to my knowledge, had nothing bene-  
ficial to the U.S. to do with it.<sup>45</sup>

When the Congress consummated the purchase in 1830, boundaries established clearly paralleled ones drawn by Street two years earlier. His accuracy prompted him to remark unabashedly: "If this was guessing-it was pretty good guessing"; he was equally adamant in his determination that opposition to removal stemmed from whites who "...live and fatten on the poor Indians, and their portion of the annuity offers too great a temptation to pass-up."<sup>46</sup> Street had specific reference

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<sup>42</sup>Ida M. Street, "A Chapter of Indian History," Annals of Iowa, Third Series, III, (1897-1899), p. 602.

<sup>43</sup>Street to Eaton, February 22, 1830; M234, Roll 696.

<sup>44</sup>Street to Clark, February 27, 1830; M234, Roll 728.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.



to traders in the last remark. Removal weakened the trader's economic strangle hold on the Indians merely by increasing the physical distance between them.

White antagonisms were not the only causes of disruption. Long-standing, inter-tribal hostilities also threatened frontier peace and tranquility. Street sensed an uneasy undercurrent in February, 1830, when he wrote: "The several tribes of Indians ~~are~~ quietly pursuing their hunts in this quarter; tho' I am induced to believe it is the breathless calm before the tornado."<sup>47</sup> Street believed war preparations were afoot among the Winnebago, Sioux, and Menominees for the following spring. He guessed their future target was the Sac and Fox tribe. Street remarked to Clark in a letter of February 27, 1830, that only "...prompt intervention of the military arm of our Government" could prevent open warfare.<sup>48</sup> By October, 1830, Street saw an all-enveloping Indian war developing. Chippewa boldness seemed the most likely source to spark a general conflagration: "Latterly [sic] the Chippewas have been darring [sic] & saucey, and I am not without some apprehension that they will at last do some mischief."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Street to Clark, February 27, 1830; M234, Roll 728.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Street to Clark, October 29, 1830; M234, Roll 696.

Conditions remained surprisingly stable until the summer of 1831, when a party of Sac and Fox warriors fell upon an encampment of sleeping Menominees around Fort Crawford, murdering twenty-five of the forty Indians camped there. Retaliation for the raid was staved off by governmental promises; guilty warriors would be brought to justice and punished by United States' military forces. However, that promise was made as an expediency, and never fully complied with.<sup>50</sup> The incident increased hatred for the Sac and Fox among other Indian tribes which erupted as an outgrowth of the Black Hawk War in 1832.

Unrest spilled over into 1832. Black Hawk was a major Sac and Fox war chief, renowned for his martial exploits. He was also known for the fairness and honesty he displayed in tribal matters. Enraged over white encroachments on tribal lands near Saukenauk, the Sac and Fox's traditional village located at the Mississippi and Rock River junction, and a disputed land cession negotiated by drunken Sac and Fox chiefs at St. Louis in 1804, Black Hawk and about 1000 followers crossed to Saukenauk from the Mississippi's west bank. The village had been abandoned early in 1832, due to spreading white settlements near it. Determined to regain lost tribal lands, reoccupy Saukenauk, and expel white squatters, Black Hawk generated wild panic along the frontier.

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<sup>50</sup>Street to Clark, August 1, 1831; M234, Roll 728.

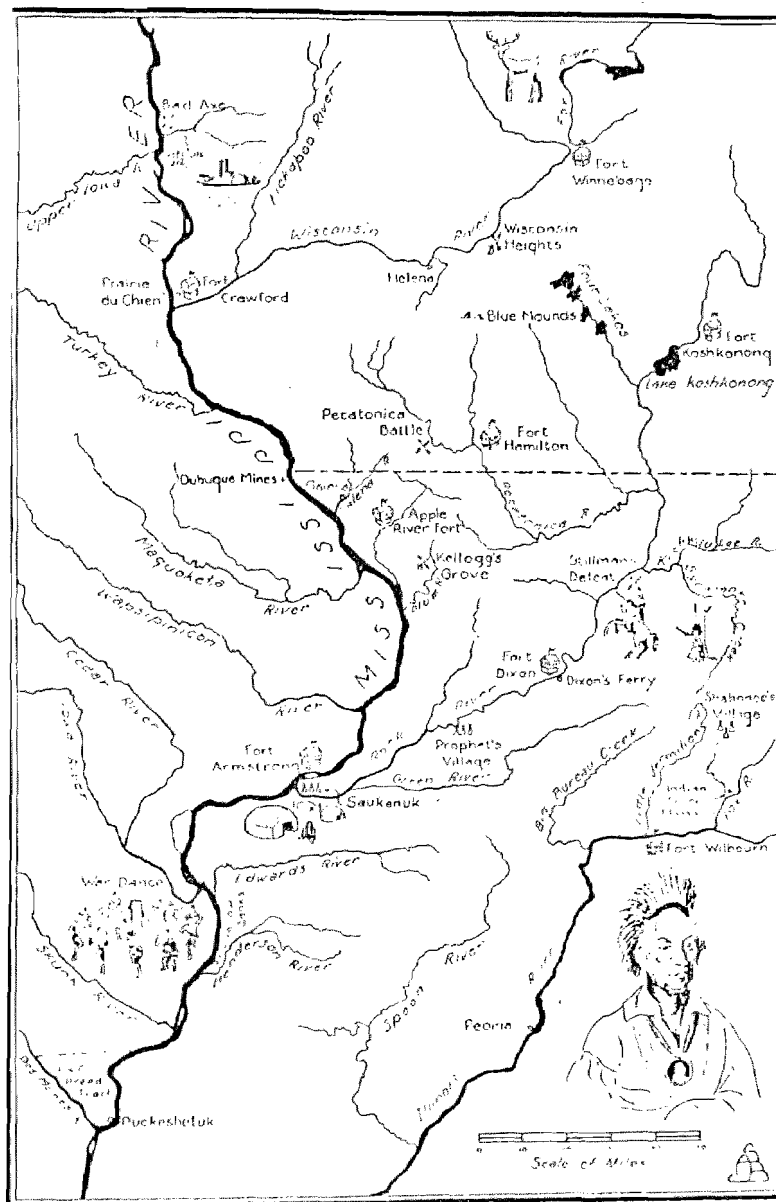


Figure 4. Map of the Black Hawk War, 1832.

Reprinted from Peterson, op. cit., p. 128.

Governor John Reynolds of Illinois ordered 1400 militia to rendezvous at Bainestown on the Illinois River to combat the hostile Sac and Fox. General Henry Atkinson wrote Street on April 25, 1832, that "...the prospect of war brightens."<sup>51</sup> Atkinson, the campaign's military leader, accurately assessed the importance of Street's position geographically and with respect to Winnebago encamped near Prairie du Chien. Atkinson added: "Inform me of anything of interest appertaining to your dept. Try & keep your Indians quiet."<sup>52</sup>

Street maintained close scrutiny over the Winnebago. He reported to Clark on August 1, 1832, that many Winnebago had come into Prairie du Chien at his request and "...encamped in front of my agency...completely under my eyes."<sup>53</sup> Street recruited Winnebago braves to intercept Sac and Fox bands which floated down the Wisconsin River in an attempt to reach and cross the Mississippi.<sup>54</sup> Winnebago reports to Street indicated Sac and Fox braves had hidden their women and children in a marshy area west of Winnebago Lake called the "Islands" for safety. The Islands was a high patch of prairie, fifteen or twenty acres in size, lying within an

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<sup>51</sup>Henry Atkinson to Street, April 25, 1832; Letter-book, p. 18.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Street to Clark, August 1, 1832; M234, Roll 728.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

impassable swamp. Approachable only by means of a narrow neck of land, the Sac and Fox mistakenly believed it afforded great protection.<sup>55</sup> Relentless pursuit by Atkinson's troops forced its abandonment. Scattered groups of Sac and Fox then sought safety by floating down the Wisconsin. Street's Winnebago patrols intercepted a number of them, killing several and taking eight scalps. Prisoners taken consisted primarily of women and children. War's hardships upon the prisoners moved Street to write in August, 1832;

The prisoners are the most miserable looking poor creatures you can imagine. Wasted to mere skeletons, clothed in rags scarcely sufficient to hide their nakedness. Some of the children look as if they had starved so long they could not be restored.<sup>56</sup>

Whites feared a general Indian uprising, even though other tribes were unsympathetic to the Sac and Fox. Atkinson cautioned Street to keep his Winnebago neutral; Street succeeded admirably in that task. Street attributed his success to forthright initiative, especially by his disbursement of increased food supplies to Winnebago allies. Congress later followed suit and authorized food distributions as inducements to guarantee Winnebago neutrality. Street related his efforts in preserving that neutrality to Clark in July, 1832:

I had for several months acted upon the principles of that law, as a measure called for by the

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<sup>55</sup>Street to Clark, June 7, 1832; M234, Roll 696.

<sup>56</sup>Street to Clark, August 1, 1832; M234, Roll 728.

exigencies of the case. Had I not assumed to do so, and extended my issues beyond what ordinarily had been their usual amount, many of the Winnebagoes of this Agency, who have by my exertions and influence been kept from the seat of war, would have drawn to the section of country occupied by the Sac & Foxes, and possibly some of them drawn into an hostile attitude against the whites.<sup>57</sup>

Street's self-esteem ballooned in a letter of August 27, 1832, to Major General Winfield Scott:

Anything you may desire to ask of the Winnebagoes that belong to my agency, will be done on my requisition through their chiefs...You will perceive that under my orders and encouragements they have been active.<sup>58</sup>

The Black Hawk War ended in a matter of months. Pursued at every turn, Black Hawk's band dwindled as food gave out and casualties mounted. In August, 1832, the decimated remnants of the original Sac and Fox band attempted to cross the Mississippi at the Bad Axe River junction. Surprised by soldiers, they suffered even larger casualties. Of the original 1000 members of Black Hawk's band, only 150 survived the entire conflict; Black Hawk was among the survivors. Government expenditures totaled nearly \$2,000,000 to eliminate only 850 Indians.<sup>59</sup> Street reported Black Hawk's capture

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<sup>57</sup>Street to Clark, July 13, 1832; Letterbook, p. 25.

<sup>58</sup>Street to Winfield Scott, August 22, 1832; Andrew Jackson Papers (Library of Congress, Roll 41).

<sup>59</sup>William J. Peterson, The Story of Iowa, I (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1952), pp. 130-131.

on August 28, 1832:

I hasten to communicate to you that the celebrated Sac chief Black Hawk, and the Prophet, were delivered to me yesterday by a party of Winnebagoes of my agency sent out by me some time past in pursuit of them.<sup>60</sup>

Black Hawk's capture was welcome news in Washington. However, Street neglected to notify the War Department of the capture before he released the same information to several newspapers which publicized his role in the capture. War Department correspondence dated September 25, 1832, reprimanded Street for his improper conduct in the matter:

Your letter of the 28th ult', announcing briefly the surrender of Black Hawk and the Prophet, was received this morning, four days after the publication in the Globe of your letter...The Department reminds you, that it is the duty of an Agent to make his earliest and most detailed communications to the government.<sup>61</sup>

Whether Street's egotism was justified or not, especially as he viewed himself as instrumental in Black Hawk's capture, Street's activities throughout the entire conflict met the approbation of Atkinson. He wrote Street on August 29, 1832:

I take this occasion to say to you that your conduct as Indian agent has been highly satisfactory to me and in all respects conformable to the interests of the U.States.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Street to Secretary of War, August 28, 1832; M234, Roll 728.

<sup>61</sup>Robb to Street, September 25, 1832; M21, Roll 9, p. 255.

<sup>62</sup>Atkinson to Street, August 29, 1832; M234, Roll 697.

Treaty negotiations with the defeated Sac and Fox commenced in September, 1832. Final provisions of Black Hawk's Treaty required the Sac and Fox to agree to land cessions west of the Mississippi roughly equivalent to the eastern quarter of present-day Iowa, which forced them to move farther west.<sup>63</sup> Street warned Clark in October, 1832, that the Black Hawk Treaty was a poor one. Street declared that Indian unrest still ran high:

But let the U.S. be ware [sic] of liberating the ringleaders of the late disturbance untill [sic] there is a more settled feeling among all the Indians<sup>64</sup> in this Quarter. The snake is "scotched-not killed."

Nonetheless, Street's prediction proved inaccurate, and a substantial degree of peace was restored. Treaty negotiations were begun with the Winnebago, also, and ratification of that treaty followed on September 15, 1832. The Indians ceded lands east of the Mississippi and south of the Wisconsin Rivers to the United States. Completion of Winnebago removal to the strip of ground set aside for that purpose (called the Neutral Ground) was scheduled for June 1, 1833.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Charles J. Kappler (comp. and ed.), Indian Treaties 1778-1883 (New York: Interland Publishing, Inc., 1972), p. 349.

<sup>64</sup>Street to Clark, October 4, 1832; M234, Roll 728.

<sup>65</sup>Kappler, op. cit., pp. 345-346.



The Winnebago treaty provided for the establishment of a school for Winnebago children (or any Indian children of any tribe) who were to receive educational instruction and mechanical training so that "...their hands should be educated."<sup>66</sup> Street fervently believed that Indian education was on equal footing with removal as a means to rescue the Indians from ignorance and exploitation. Street's support of Indian education dated back to his arrival at Prairie du Chien. Thomas McKenney had echoed Street's sentiment. In a letter to Street written on April 13, 1830, McKenney urged Indian education which, "...once under way, the benefits will be apparent, and more will be sent, and at the Indians' will, clamor for an extension of the privilege."<sup>67</sup> Staunch and unrelenting opposition erupted from the American Fur Company. The Company feared Indian education would generate an increase in Indian agricultural settlements, prompt Indians to abandon their traditional, nomadic lifestyle in favor of a settled existence, and force Indian recognition of the American Fur Company's strangling monopoly.<sup>68</sup> The Company's influence, inadvertently supported by bureaucratic inefficiency

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<sup>66</sup>Street, "A Chapter of Indian History," op. cit., p. 606.

<sup>67</sup>Thomas L. McKenney to Street, April 30, 1830; M21, Roll 6, pp. 384-386.

<sup>68</sup>Street, "Joseph Street's Last Fight With the Fur Traders," op. cit., p. 113.

and delay, prevented actual construction of the school from beginning until the following spring in 1834.

Street's advocacy of removal revived near the end of 1832 in conjunction with Winnebago education. He believed vested interests such as the Company, motivated by selfish drives, strove to block removal in order to preserve their commercial primacy. American Fur Company pressure was "...made to bear upon the U.S. [to] prevent 100.<sup>s</sup> for a time from migrating to the West if some countervailing measures are not taken."<sup>69</sup> To facilitate removal, Street proposed dispensing annuity payments west of the Mississippi, and abandonment of the Winnebago agency at the Fox-Wisconsin River portage.<sup>70</sup> Street wrote agent John Kinzie in November, 1832, relating the substance of a letter to Clark:

I urged that the security and future peace of the country required that they remove West, and that the country was incapable of supporting those on it...and that difficulties would be inevitable, and that all our influence ought to be executed to induce them to go to the West.<sup>71</sup>

Of the American Fur Company, Street said:

Mr. J. Rolette, Agent of the A.Fur Co...informed me that the Winnebagoes would not remove West...He added that he would do all in his power to prevent them from going West of the Miss."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Street to Clark, October 7, 1832; M234, Roll 728.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Street, "A Chapter of Indian History," op. cit., p. 608.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

By 1833, Street had assumed firm control of his agency. Basic issues became apparent which set the tone for his subsequent years as agent. Within the overall context of Indian affairs, American Fur Company machinations, Indian education, removal, and white encroachments, all jelled to form an active matrix around which Street centered his official duties.

## CHAPTER IV

### PRAIRIE DU CHIEN, 1833-1834

Street's final two years at Prairie du Chien witnessed a continuation of the primary issues which had occupied his attention during the 1827-1832 period. White encroachments on supposedly sovereign Indian lands, Indian education, and most importantly, Indian removal, remained Street's main areas of interest. A certain portion of each issue was contained within a formal complaint lodged against Street in December, 1833, by Hercules Dousman, the American Fur Company's general agent, and partner of Joseph Rolette. Dousman accused Street of misappropriation of funds and conflict of interest. Dousman's charges imbued the period 1833 to 1834 with a cohesive framework, graphically drawing each basic issue with which Street dealt. Moreover, the charges outlined a pattern of activity and opposing forces which directly affected the balance of Street's tenure as an Indian agent.

In January, 1833, Street faced another sensitive problem involving whites. Swelling numbers of white settlers had entered Indian country, some of which lay on the Mississippi's east bank, but primarily on the west bank. Those lands were ceded (September, 1832) by Black Hawk, but still legally inhabited by the Sac and Fox. Street notified the War Department of the situation and received this reply:

...in the case of intruders, their expulsion from the Indian Country is a rule, not to be deviated from on any consideration, whatever the pretense may be, or under the color of whatever alledged [sic] right. A strict and firm conformity to those principles is demanded of those on whom, devolves the duty of carrying them into effect.<sup>1</sup>

Street received permission to remove the trespassers and he solicited assistance from Colonel Zachary Taylor at Fort Crawford. Some of the intruders had already left, advised to do so by the Indian agent at Rock Island.<sup>2</sup> Street found expulsion of white trespassers a touchy, explosive issue; he believed that illegal settlers would not vacate the region quietly.<sup>3</sup> Substantial white settlement, protected by white antipathy to Indian territorial sovereignty and the agent's weak coercive powers, grew on, and near, Indian lands. A War Department communication reminded Street on March 29, 1833:

...that you are empowered as Indian agent to call upon the commanding officer at Prairie du Chien or Rock Island for such a military force as may be

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<sup>1</sup>Elbert Herring to Joseph Street, January 14, 1833; Bureau of Indian Affairs; Letters Sent, 1824-1881; National Archives, Record Group 75; Series M21, Roll 9, p. 490. (Hereinafter referred to as M21.)

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Street to Zachary Taylor, February 16, 1833; Bureau of Indian Affairs; Letters Received, 1824-1881; National Archives, Record Group 75; Series M234, Roll 696. (Hereinafter referred to as M234.)

<sup>3</sup>Street to Herring, March 6, 1833; M234, Roll 696.

sufficient to expel and keep off intruders from lands lately ceded to the United States by the Sac and Fox Indians.<sup>4</sup>

Street elected to allow Indian land claims to expire, rather than force a confrontation. Sac and Fox claims expired on June 1, 1833. Street's discretion in the potentially explosive situation was an expediency justified by his desire to preserve peace and promote removal without acrimonious bickerings.

Street's reluctance to expel the intruders reinforced his faith in removal. Street saw education as the Indian's sole rescuer. Elbert Herring, Commissioner of Indian Affairs from July 10, 1832 to July 4, 1836, agreed that "...the benefits derivable from that source will be gradual but they are infallible."<sup>5</sup> American Fur Company opposition seemed the likeliest source of obstruct Indian progress through education. As Street put it:

The success of these measures, the education of the Indian mind and the Indian character, rescues them from the rapacious hands of the traders, and the heartless speculation, and clothesthem with an independence unknown in their wild, ungoverned state. Though free to roam as they list, Indians in the vicinity of whites, and in awe of their power are the mere slaves of the unprincipled white population engaged in the Indian Trade. From this thraldom it

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<sup>4</sup>Herring to Street, March 29, 1833; M21, Roll 10, p. 164.

<sup>5</sup>Herring to Street, March 5, 1833; M21, Roll 10, pp. 93-94.

is the duty as it is to the interest of the Government of the United States to liberate the Indians.<sup>6</sup>

Although Street endeavored to stimulate Winnebago education, operating through 1832 treaty provisions which set aside \$7500 for that purpose, his signal efforts occurred after 1834 and his transfer to Rock Island.

Indian removal became Street's primary interest. Street's official correspondence resounded with declarations on all removal aspects. Elbert Herring wrote Street in March, 1833, that removal was essential, "...being likely to promote their own welfare and the interests of the white citizens."<sup>7</sup> Herring wrote Street the following month, declaring his conviction that Indian removal was mandatory: "The measure is imperatively demanded, by considerations growing out of their own interest and the safety of our own citizens, and will be enforced."<sup>8</sup> Street realized successful completion of the project was hindered by American Fur Company opposition:

...the agent of the American Fur Company here, would exert all the materials he could opprate [sic] upon, to prevent the removeal [sic] as it

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<sup>6</sup>Ida M. Street, "A Chapter of Indian History," Annals of Iowa, Third Series, III, (1897-1899), p. 612.

<sup>7</sup>Herring to Street, March 5, 1833; M21, Roll 10, pp. 93-94.

<sup>8</sup>Herring to Street, April 6, 1833; M21, Roll 10, p. 108.

would interfere with the Fur Trade...The interpreter at Fort Winnebago is in the pay of the Fur Company and...is exerting his influence to induce these Indians to make villages on<sup>9</sup> the Wisconsin [sic] below and near the Portage.

Street believed his influence over the Winnebago was potent enough in itself to secure their removal:

And my Indians are not in the habit of making any demands of me. An intercourse established in confidence, and continued in deep affection, has no recourse to such measures. For the events of the last year must have convinced the most skeptical, that there is an influence exerted at this agency, over the Indians for the benefit alike of the United States and the Indian.<sup>10</sup>

Time and again, Street railed against American Fur Company intransigence to removal and its favorable outgrowths. He asked:

Is it reasonable to suppose the Department will advise the entire abandonment in this Quarter, of these great and inter<sup>es</sup>ting objects? Can they consent to the sacrifice of half a nation of Indians, to glut the cupidity of a few white men?<sup>11</sup>

Street declared his interest rested upon unselfish motives:

"I have no personal or pecuniary interest in this matter apart from a deep sense of responsibility as a man and officer."<sup>12</sup> Less commendable motives sparked the Company to desire retention of the Winnebago east of the Mississippi. The Company wanted the Winnebago under its control, easily

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<sup>9</sup>Street to Clark, June 24, 1833; M234, Roll 728.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.



accessible, in order to oversee the Indian trade.<sup>13</sup> The Company brought direct pressure to bear to hinder Winnebago removal. Herring informed Street that "...the conduct of Mr. Rolette...in endeavoring to dissuade them from removing to the West is highly reprehensible."<sup>14</sup>

By August, 1833, Winnebago removal had begun. Several bands, pressured by increasingly scarce supplies of game, chose to move rather than starve. Street reported several hundred had moved. Those who had crossed the Mississippi missed part of their annuity payment. Annuities, paid in food and cash, were authorized by treaty stipulations and acted as an encouragement for western removal. Street argued in a letter to Clark in August, 1833, that annuities paid at Prairie du Chien, rather than the Fox-Wisconsin Portage, would lure the Indians westward. Street reasoned that removal was more easily implemented at Prairie du Chien.<sup>15</sup> He disagreed with War Department claims, relative to opinions expressed by Michigan Territorial Governor Peter Porter, that Winnebago annuities were too large-Street insisted they were too small.<sup>16</sup> Street's criticism of annuity payment procedures

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<sup>13</sup>Street to Clark, June 24, 1833; M234, Roll 728.

<sup>14</sup>Herring to Street, July 13, 1833; M21, Roll 11, p. 46.

<sup>15</sup>Street to Herring, August 1, 1833; M234, Roll 696.

<sup>16</sup>Cass to Street, August 9, 1833; M21, Roll 11, pp. 104-106.

threatened American Fur Company involvement in trading at those payments. Street sensed his unrelenting condemnation of the Company made him a likely target for retribution, a prediction borne out by later events.<sup>17</sup>

Street did not enjoy the complete confidence or support of Secretary of War Cass. Street's friendship with one Major Thomas Biddle sparked hostilities between Street and Cass. Biddle wrote highly critical, anonymous newspaper accounts of Cass' Indian treaty negotiations, lacing those accounts with derogatory personal remarks. Initially, Cass believed Street to be the articles' author. Eventually, he discovered Biddle's involvement and forgave him, but retained an antipathy to Street that was unwarranted, but potent.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, Cass had asked President Andrew Jackson to remove Street from office in 1833, ostensibly because Street was a Whig, and not a Jackson Democrat. Jackson refused to remove Street, saying: "I know General Street is a Whig, but he is an honest man and as long as I am president, he shall be Indian agent."<sup>19</sup> Jackson's favorable attitude towards

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<sup>17</sup>Cass to Street, August 9, 1833; M21, Roll 11, pp. 104-106.

<sup>18</sup>Street to Montfort Stokes, August 26, 1833; Joseph Montfort Street Letterbook, held by the Iowa State Department of History and Archives, Des Moines, Iowa, p. 33. (Hereinafter referred to as Letterbook.)

<sup>19</sup>Ida M. Street, "Joseph Street's Last Fight with the Fur Traders," Annals of Iowa, Third Series, XVII (1929), p. 131.

Street was based upon his earlier association with Street while riding the judicial circuit years before in Tennessee while Street was reading law under Henry Clay. Street further suspected Cass' close, protege-type relationship to Judge James Doty who heard the Brunet case. Overt actions taken against Street were cloudy, but Cass did manage to keep Street's life unsettled by an unwanted agency shift in 1834. Street viewed that move as representative of deeper motivations, motivations he suspected were leveled directly against himself:

Finding me constantly exerting my influence to civilize and reclaim the Indians from the Iron bondage of ignorance which they have them, the agent at this place and his traders are doing all they can to endeavor to get me removed. What steps they may take-I do not know, but I am told by a friend that they are endeavoring...to work upon Cass in such a way as to get me removed if possible.<sup>20</sup>

By 1836, Street was completely convinced that his initial suspicions of Cass were well-grounded; Street's transfer to Rock Island in September, 1834, which he bitterly opposed, put to rest any remaining doubts. Street's efforts to induce Cass to rescind the transfer took Street to Washington in the summer of 1834. Cass' refusal to meet Street caused him to remark bitterly to subagent Thomas P. Burnett (at Prairie du Chien) that "...Cass is slippery."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Street to Stokes, August 26, 1833; Letterbook, p. 33.

<sup>21</sup>Street, "Joseph Street's Last Fight With the Fur Traders," loc. cit.

The chief opponent of removal was the American Fur Company. Indubitably, Street looked upon that enterprise as the frontier's most anti-Indian establishment. Street constantly spoke out against Company schemes:

Every attempt to civilize Indians in this section is violently opposed by the agent of the American Fur Company and all their traders. They live on the savages ignorance and brutality of the Inds. and lead him into the most debasing immorality and they strive to keep them ignorant savages and brutally ignorant.<sup>22</sup>

By June of 1834, Street's removal concepts had crystallized. Removal, by Street's thinking, was necessary for several reasons. Expanded white settlements on the fringe of Indian lands grew increasingly important. Removal would also tend to complicate the whiskey peddler's labors in selling "ardent spirits" in undeveloped areas west of the Mississippi. Last, in a very practical sense, the cost of removal remained far less than that of a resultant Indian war which Street felt was imminent if the Winnebago continued to inhabit lands east of the Mississippi.<sup>23</sup> Street remarked in a blanket statement of removal that "...It is demanded by the best interests of the Winnebagoes that they go West and forever."<sup>24</sup> Street believed the whiskey sellers wielded

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<sup>22</sup>Street to Stokes, August 26, 1833; Letterbook, p. 33.

<sup>23</sup>Street to Herring, June 4, 1834; M234, Roll 697.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

great power over the Indians. Traders offered up a serious, entrenched obstacle to removal:

...everything within the power and control of the Department should be so disposed and used, as to save these ignorant savages from the devastating tide of liquid fire that a remorseless band of cold, calculating heartless Traders are pouring into their country to madden [sic], blind, and deceive them.<sup>25</sup>

Indians decried both whiskey selling and white encroachments. Keokuk, an important Sac chief, protested white designs on Indian lands, arguing that whites were unsatisfied with lands ceded by the 1832 Black Hawk Treaty. Keokuk claimed covetous white men eyed Sac and Fox territory on the Mississippi's west bank, intent upon migrating there, also.<sup>26</sup> Keokuk suggested to Street that his tribe be allowed to remove even farther west. The Des Moines River area impressed Keokuk as an acceptable, permanent location, and Street relayed the information and Keokuk's request for removal to Clark in August, 1834.<sup>27</sup> (The establishment of a new Sac and Fox agency on the Des Moines in 1838, with Street as its agent, eventually fulfilled Keokuk's request.) Keokuk hoped for War Department approval of his request, since Indian proximity to whites created serious problems as the Indians easily secured whiskey and would often "...do mischief to the whites."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Street to Herring, June 4, 1834; M234, Roll 697.

<sup>26</sup>Street to Clark, August 19, 1834; M234, Roll 729.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

Winnebago removal plans suffered a serious setback in the late summer of 1834. Congress hastily passed an act which called for the reorganization of all Indian agencies in the Michigan Territory. Street was directly affected. The Sac and Fox agency at Rock Island was transferred to Green Bay, and its Indians and their lands were transferred to the Prairie du Chien agency; the responsibility for all those Indians at Prairie du Chien fell on Street. Unfortunately, he was transferred to Rock Island to oversee operations of the new consolidated agency.<sup>29</sup> Street hotly protested the transfer. He cited American Fur Company pressure and trader self-interests, intent upon retaining the established features of the profitable fur trade, as blamable for Street's unwanted and untimely transfer. Street said:

Unable to affect me in any way where we are alike known, their savage vengeance has pursued me into your office-and had they the power not only denunciation but proscription and banishment would be inflicted upon me.<sup>30</sup>

Street responded to his transfer with a counter-proposal. Street proposed transferring the Rock Island agency to Green Bay, but would assign all Sac, Fox, and Winnebago Indians to Prairie du Chien. Street's proposals made Prairie du Chien rather than Rock Island the principal

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<sup>29</sup>Street, "Joseph Street's Last Fight With the Fur Traders," pp. 121-122.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

agency.<sup>31</sup> Advantageous from his own position, Street's plan allowed firm control of Indian affairs from Prairie du Chien, provided more pupils for the Winnebago school (which was then under construction), and eliminated the necessity for Street to maintain two residences, one at Prairie du Chien and the other at Rock Island.<sup>32</sup>

Street's proposal availed him nothing. He wrote Cass from Rock Island on September 12, 1834, requesting permission to return to Prairie du Chien. Street remained at Rock Island until October 28, 1834, when the War Department allowed him to return to Prairie du Chien until April 1, 1835. At that time, his permanent assignment to Rock Island was scheduled to begin.<sup>33</sup> Street did not repair to Rock Island without additional protestation. His letter of September 12, 1834, painted a dreary picture of conditions at Rock Island-irreparable agency buildings and the presence of few Indians caused Street to conclude that "...no public or private benefit will be attained by the presence of an Indian Agent at Rock Island."<sup>34</sup> On a personal basis, Street bemoaned the forced separation from his family (who remained

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<sup>31</sup>Street, "Joseph Street's Last Fight With the Fur Traders," pp. 121-122.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Kurtz to Street, October 28, 1834; M21, Roll 14, p. 104.

<sup>34</sup>Street to Cass, September 12, 1834; M234, Roll 697.

at Prairie du Chien) and friends, as well as the loss of "preached religion."<sup>35</sup>

Street discounted Rock Island's advantages as an Indian agency. Zachary Taylor, Street's close friend and a prominent figure in frontier affairs, concurred. Taylor upheld Street's contention that the agency was most advantageously located at Prairie du Chien. Taylor argued that the area of eastern Iowa was rapidly filling with whites, making Indian travel to Prairie du Chien possible without traversing white-held lands, a feat impossible at Rock Island; Winnebago bands would preserve clear communications if Prairie du Chien were retained as the agency location.<sup>36</sup> Taylor believed Prairie du Chien straddled a crucial junction in frontier Indian movements due to navigable rivers like the Mississippi, Wisconsin, and the Fox, each serving as a "great thoroughfare."<sup>37</sup> Taylor added: "It therefore appears to me that a resident agent could do more good here than at any other place on the upper Mississippi."<sup>38</sup> Street wholeheartedly agreed with Taylor's assessment, but the sway of their arguments was not convincing enough to alter Street's

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<sup>35</sup>Street to Cass, September 12, 1834; M234, Roll 697.

<sup>36</sup>Taylor to Street, September 6, 1834; Letterbook, p. 44.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.



transfer, and he went to Rock Island.

Resigned to his transfer, Street quickly formulated a policy to manage Sac and Fox bands "...who have been greatly agitated by the events of the past few years."<sup>39</sup> The Sac and Fox desired a new agency located farther west on the Des Moines River, and they expressed a willingness to concede certain parcels of land in eastern Iowa to guarantee an agency shift to the Des Moines. Street supported the plan:

I would with great deference, respectfully suggest, the necessity of early adopting the following measures as best calculated to secure the peace of the frontier, and advance the improvement and civilization of the Indians-To wit-

1. "The purchase at an early day in the ensuing spring of the Indian reservation on the Ioway River.
2. ...the selection of a proper place on the Des Moines and the erection of agency buildings... and
3. ...establishment of an agency for the Sac & Foxes on the Des Moines."<sup>40</sup>

Street attached great importance to those proposals. He stated that any and all possible measures should be undertaken to remove the Indians. The creeping tide of white settlement would be offset by strategically locating agencies so Indians were not forced to cross white lands to reach them.<sup>41</sup>

Ironically, Street's adamant support for Indian removal suffered a setback on account of his transfer to Rock

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<sup>39</sup>Street to Clark, September 12, 1834; M234, Roll 729.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

Island. Agency details and moving difficulties during the last four months of 1834 restricted him from actively pursuing tangible removal results. In Street's mind, there existed not the smallest particle of doubt that American Fur Company influence, venting itself through Cass in Washington, instigated his much-protested transfer to Rock Island. Company opposition to Street found a more visible form in allegations leveled at Street by Hercules Dousman in December, 1833. Dousman charged Street with fraud and conflict of interest. Subtle attacks on Street were replaced by a concerted effort to remove him. Examination of the Dousman charges, their development, and final disposition detail a fascinating period of Street's tenure.

In December, 1833, Hercules Dousman brought serious charges against Street, stating Street's official conduct "...to have been anything but such as became an upright Agent & the character he puts forth of being a Christian."<sup>42</sup> Dousman claimed that Street had paid an insufficient salary to interpreter Anable Grignon for services rendered (although sufficient funds had been appropriated by Congress for those services), and pocketed the difference.<sup>43</sup> Affidavits supported Dousman's charges, the testimonies being

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<sup>42</sup>Hercules Dousman to Herring, December 4, 1833; M234, Roll 696.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

statements by Anable Grignon himself, Joseph Rolette (a Company trader), James Lockwood (a merchant), and Louis Menard. Grignon and Menard acted as interpreters in Indian dealings with the government. Dousman alleged that both made their mark on vouchers acknowledging payment for their services, although neither could read or write, and was unable to ascertain exactly the amount for which he had signed. Grignon was paid only \$20 per month, almost \$15 per month less than Street asserted that he paid out. Menard stated that he received no money whatsoever.<sup>44</sup> Dousman couched his charges in the "public good", stating "...the object of the vouchers to have been to defraud the United States out of the said sum of money."<sup>45</sup> James Lockwood, who signed one of the affidavits, further charged that Street had defrauded him of \$100 worth of goods which Street had purchased from Lockwood on credit. Street allegedly failed to settle with Lockwood, although he had been instructed to pay the claim by the War Department. Besides the claims of fraud, Dousman maintained that Street, in partnership with his son Thomas P. Street, operated a trading post which undercut local merchants. However, Dousman qualified his accusation by adding:

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<sup>44</sup>Hercules Dousman to Herring, December 4, 1833; M234, Roll 696.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

It is impossible to know if Gen'l. Street is concerned in trade with his son, but it is the belief of all persons concerned here that he furnishes all the capital & is the principle [sic] partner.<sup>46</sup>

Street responded in typical fashion. He wrote Clark on February 9, 1834, denouncing the Company. However, Street allowed that the charges were not unexpected in light of his support of removal, Indian education, and his general opposition to American Fur Company designs: "The course taken, has been some time threatened, unless I conform to the views of Mr. Rolette and his creatures, and surrender the Indians of my agency to them."<sup>47</sup> Street felt Company wealth generated great power which was used to advance Company ends at the expense of the Indians. The Company had either brought out or forced out of business every other trader in the region, building a huge monopoly in the process.<sup>48</sup> The Company became Street's most formidable foe because he obstructed the unlimited use of that power.

Official reaction completely upheld Street. Clark informed the War Department in February, 1834, that Street's payment of the Lockwood claim (in 1831) was official, conformed to established procedures, and from all available evidence, was paid in October, 1831. Any evidence presented to

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<sup>46</sup>Hercules Dousman to Herring, December 4, 1833; M234, Roll 696.

<sup>47</sup>Street to Clark, February 9, 1834; M234, Roll 697.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

the contrary was suspect, Clark contended, adding: "I would place but little confidence in the statement of Joseph Rolette against any officer of the Government."<sup>49</sup> Reaction from an unofficial source came unexpectedly from Shawneetown, Illinois, where Street had lived from 1812 to 1827, prior to his appointment as an Indian agent. Sixty of the town's citizens signed an affidavit which attested to Street's upright character. The affidavit stated that Street had lived among them for many years and was "...repeatedly honored with the confidence of the people...he had uniformly sustained a character of the most unimpeachable integrity."<sup>50</sup>

Street traveled to Washington to present his defence of the charges. In July, 1834, he presented personal affidavits of his own, sworn before justices of the peace in Washington, in which he denied any involvement with his son's mercantile business at Prairie du Chien.<sup>51</sup> Street stated that he had faithfully paid Lockwood's \$100 claim as well as equitably reimbursed all interpreters.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Clark to Herring, February 3, 1834; M234, Roll 697.

<sup>50</sup>Shawneetown to Cass, February 25, 1834; M234, Roll 697.

<sup>51</sup>Affidavit, District of Columbia, July 16, 1834; M234, Roll 697.

<sup>52</sup>Affidavit, District of Columbia, July 17, 1834; M234, Roll 697.

Strong endorsements of Street's character and the performance of his duties as an Indian agent came from other sources. Governor John Reynolds of Illinois wrote Cass in early March, 1834, praising Street:

I have been intimately acquainted with Gen'l Street for many years and know him to be a very talented gentleman and excellent moral character... I know nothing of the particular charges preferred against Gen'l Street; but judging from his general character, and from the influence he has over said Indians which has been exercised to the advantage of all I am satisfied his continuance in office would advance the public good.<sup>53</sup>

Zachary Taylor wrote Street in April, 1834, referring to Dousman's charges. Taylor, a faithful Street supporter, exclaimed that the charges were untrue. Taylor thought that the American Fur Company's opposition to Street's Indian improvement efforts was the actual stimulus for the charges. He added (in defense of Street's character):

Having known you personally for more than a quarter of a century, during which time you have uniformly maintained a high character for morality, honesty, & integrity, as well as on all occasions a correct and gentlemanly deportment, & having constantly witnessed your devotion & untiring exertions since I have been stationed at this place to improve the condition of the Indians of your agency.<sup>54</sup>

Taylor believed Company hostility to Street initially hatched the entire scheme. The affidavits submitted by Dousman were

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<sup>53</sup>Reynolds to Cass, March 6, 1834; M234, Roll 697.

<sup>54</sup>Taylor to Street, April 15, 1834; M234, Roll 697.

signed by four men of "doubtful character", two of whom, Menard and Grignon, were illiterate and completely ignorant of the entire affair. And the other two, Rolette and Lockwood, Taylor postulated: "...I know to be personally hostile to you [and] would stop at nothing to effect your removal from office, or impair your standing with the Offices of the Government."<sup>55</sup> Taylor impugned Rolette's character, much as Clark had done: "Rolette...is not only notorious for vending whiskey to the Indians & keeping them constantly drunk...but for violating the law...by introducing into their country ardent spirits."<sup>56</sup>

Street made his official reply to the charges on May 28, 1834. In a letter to Commissioner of Indian Affairs Elbert Herring, Street vehemently condemned the American Fur Company and its agents, and strenuously protested his innocence of all charges. Street's denial left little to the imagination; he labeled the four men who signed affidavits supporting the charges made against him as an agent of the American Fur Company (Rolette), a trader and whiskey-seller (Lockwood), a drunken "half-Indian" (Grignon), and a "trifling half-Negroes or mulatto", referring to Menard.<sup>57</sup> Their

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<sup>55</sup>Taylor to Street, April 15, 1834; M234, Roll 697.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Street to Herring, May 28, 1834; M234, Roll 697.

testimony, Street contended, was poor evidence because of their unsavory characters and contradictions in their accounts and receipts. Street fumed about the attempt to discredit him. He was:

Opposed by an organized body of unprincipled men, with the almost unlimited resources of the American Fur Co. to back them, with fit materials for every species of fraud & corruption in their power.<sup>58</sup>

And those allied against him were:

...an unprincipled set of traders who they knew were opposing every effort made by the Department for the benefit of the Indians, & were now harassing officers of the Government by vexatious lawsuits; I have drawn upon my head the most determined resentment of these men.<sup>59</sup>

Street denied that he distributed Indian provisions at Prairie du Chien to generate business for his son Thomas' commercial enterprise:

...this would not have met the views of the Traders who were making a rich harvest in the transportation at high rates of these provisions from one place in the Indian Country to another place in the Indian country.<sup>60</sup>

Street reasoned that the traders desired to prevent the westward removal of the Indians living east of the Mississippi to exploit them commercially. Disregarding the intense barrage of criticism he endured, Street steadfastly maintained

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<sup>58</sup>Street to Herring, May 28, 1834; M234, Roll 697.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.



that his viability and effectiveness as an agent were unimpaired. Street said the charges were made "...with the direct intention of drawing off my efforts from the Indians to defend myself."<sup>61</sup> As for his supposed failure to pay the interpreters, Street claimed Grignon, "...who is drunken and worthless and used from necessity" was employed merely because nobody else could be found.<sup>62</sup> Street insisted that Lockwood was paid; Lockwood's motives were seriously questioned by Street for his participation in Dousman's charges:

And why has it quietly reposed in his bosom near two and a half years? And now has been secreted extracted by and before the agents of the American Fur Company at Prairie du Chien, at a time when the success of their plans in retaining the Winnebagoes on the Wisconsin [sic], depend on getting me removed, or denuded in the confidence previously reposed in me by the Government?<sup>63</sup>

Street reserved violent condemnation for Rolette, inferring that Rolette was the prime mover behind the accusations leveled against Street: "Notorious as a common liar, I could not hope to get the truth if he had sworn, yet has not."<sup>64</sup>

A War Department investigation of Dousman's charges exonerated Street. Herring informed Street on July 16, 1834:

After a careful examination of the affidavits and papers touching the charges of official malconduct preferred against you, it affords me gratification to assure you, that the Department perceives

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<sup>61</sup>Street to Herring, May 28, 1834; M234, Roll 697.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

no good reason for the withdrawal of its confidence, and that you will therefore be continued in the Service of the Government as one of its Indian Agents.<sup>65</sup>

The investigation completely disallowed the Lockwood claim, owing to Street's record of accounts and the testimony of other local merchants who vouched for Street's punctual payment of debts, most of which were substantially larger than Lockwood's \$100 claim. From Street's financial records and vouchers, it was ascertained that while he combined payment for more than one interpreter on his quarterly reports to the War Department, the practice was irregular but not illegal. The War Department ordered Street to discontinue the practice as a means to simplify his accounts. Street's explanation of that point was accepted and the Department granted that he had disbursed all funds appropriated to his agency. Last, the investigation disallowed the charge that Street had engaged in a business with his son Thomas. Street admitted that Thomas kept a store in the agency house for a short duration ( six months) while a structure was under construction to house his enterprise, but maintained that no conflict of interest existed. Street charged his son Thomas \$100 per month for the privilege of keeping a store in the agency house, an amount which Joseph Street duly accounted for and applied to the rent of the agency buildings to hold

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<sup>65</sup>Herring to Street, July 16, 1834; M21, Roll 13, pp. 202-203.

government expenses down, an explanation viewed with approval by the expense-conscious War Department.<sup>66</sup>

Street acted to aid the Winnebago, notably through removal, throughout 1833 and 1834. His endeavors threw him into acrimonious conflict with the American Fur Company and its myriad of interests. The Company strove to break the stalemate by accomplishing Street's removal from office by charges based on feeble evidence, all of which Street successfully refuted. Overwhelming proof and outside support from a variety of sources gave support so potent that the Company sought a more direct avenue to rid itself of troublesome Street. Company influence exerted in Washington and the government during a reorganizational period of the Bureau of Indian Affairs resulted in Street's transfer to Rock Island late in the summer of 1834. His ardent protests availed him nothing, and the following spring found Street about to begin his duties at a new agency, Rock Island.

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<sup>66</sup>Herring to Dousman, July 19, 1834; M21, Roll 13, pp. 220-222.

## CHAPTER V

### ROCK ISLAND, 1835-1837

Over Street's protests, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Elbert Herring ordered Street to return to Rock Island on March 5, 1835. Street took up the agent's duties there on April 1, 1835.<sup>1</sup> He retained responsibility for the Indians inhabiting the region around Prairie du Chien, although Rock Island became his permanent agency location. Street soon found that management of affairs at Prairie du Chien was complicated and difficult while he was stationed at Rock Island. The Winnebago school, authorized by treaty provisions of September, 1832, was one endeavor Street found himself unable to adequately supervise. He ardently held education to be the Indian's salvation from a nomadic life; so the discovery that he would not be in a position to oversee the vital workings of the school distressed Street. The school's construction was delayed a full year, until the spring of 1834, by a governmental policy dispute over its proposed location. Initial orders called for construction west of the Mississippi, but the order was countermanded by Secretary of War Lewis Cass in 1833, and construction slated

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<sup>1</sup>Elbert Herring to Joseph Street, March 5, 1835; Bureau of Indian Affairs; Letters Sent, 1824-1881; National Archives, Record Group 75; Series M21, Roll 15, p. 124. (Hereinafter referred to as M21.)

east of the Mississippi. Cass' order was eventually rescinded, and the final location of the school made west of the river. The dispute consumed an entire year, with one full building season lost through the confusion.<sup>2</sup> Construction began in the spring of 1834, and completed in the fall of that same year. Situated on the Yellow River six miles above its confluence with the Mississippi, the school consisted of a frame building built on a small, rich prairie ideally suited for the school's accompanying farm.

Street had received his transfer orders to Rock Island shortly after contracts were let for the school's construction in the spring of 1834. He protested bitterly, arguing that few Indians inhabited the area adjacent to Rock Island. (The Black Hawk Treaty of 1832 included Sac and Fox land cessions which removed them from the Rock Island area.) But more important, Fort Crawford's commanding officer was assigned the unwelcome task of school overseer. Since command frequently changed, a military officer found it impossible to grasp the reins of the school's operation over a short period of time. Street argued fruitlessly that the commander had not the time nor inclination to involve himself in non-military matters like school supervision.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Bruce E. Mahan, Old Fort Crawford and the Frontier (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1926), p. 201.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 202-203.

However, all of Street's protests and reasonings went unheeded, the transfer stood, and Street reluctantly moved to Rock Island.

In October, 1834, Reverend David Lowry, a Presbyterian minister from Tennessee, was appointed the school's teacher by President Andrew Jackson at an annual salary of \$500.<sup>5</sup> With Lowry's wife Mary Ann serving as his assistant, Lowry opened the school early in 1835. A heated controversy embroiled the school almost immediately. One Father Samuel Charles Mazzuchelli, an Italian Dominican priest, protested the school's operation in May, 1835.<sup>6</sup> Mazzuchelli had served the Church for over thirty years in the areas of Wisconsin, Illinois, northern Michigan, and Iowa. He had applied for the Winnebago teacher's position in 1833 to Michigan Territorial Governor George B. Porter, but Lowry gained the appointment. Mazzuchelli insisted the school be placed under the Catholic Church's auspices, with Catholic religious instruction an integral part of the curriculum.<sup>7</sup> Mazzuchelli's resentment at being refused the appointment

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<sup>5</sup>Herring to Taylor, October 6, 1834; M21, Roll 14, pp. 12-14. Mahan, op. cit., p. 215.

<sup>6</sup>Carey A. Harris to Father Samuel Mazzuchelli, May 23, 1835; M21, Roll 16, pp. 139-140.

<sup>7</sup>Kenneth E. Colton, "Father Mazzuchelli's Iowa Mission," Annals of Iowa, Third Series, XXI, (July, 1937-April, 1939), p. 297.

in favor of Lowry prompted him to make verbal assaults on Street (who supported Lowry without reservation), although Mazzuchelli hardly knew Street. Mazzuchelli's attitude reflected his close friendship with both Hercules Dousman and Joseph Rolette, American Fur Company traders who hoped to operate through Mazzuchelli to disrupt the school.<sup>8</sup>

Mazzuchelli defamed Street: "Do not trust General Street he is a real liquorite and a bad man I say this although I never spoke to him."<sup>9</sup> Mazzuchelli criticized Lowry and called for his termination as Winnebago teacher, but was informed by the War Department that Lowry and his wife "...were strongly recommended to the favorable consideration of the government."<sup>10</sup> Zachary Taylor suspected American Fur Company intrigue sparked Mazzuchelli's intense agitation. In a letter of July 2, 1835, to Clark, Taylor fumed that Lowry, an American, was criticized by a "foreigner" and Italian Catholic priest "...at the instance of a few individuals concerned with the American Fur Company."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Colton, op. cit., p. 305.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 310.

<sup>10</sup>Harris to Mazzuchelli, May 23, 1835; Roll 16, pp. 139-140.

<sup>11</sup>Zachary Taylor to William Clark, July 2, 1835; Bureau of Indian Affairs; Letters Received, 1824-1881; National Archives, Record Group 75; Series M234, Roll 697. (Hereinafter referred to as M234.)

In spite of delays and Mazzuchelli's protests, Street believed the school would ultimately enjoy great success:

Everything now bids fair to the entire success of these interesting experiments, if the means set apart for the Indians are properly applied to the intended object-the turning the attention of the Indian from a roaming life, dependent upon the success of his hunting, to a settled life, dependent upon the success of the soil.<sup>12</sup>

Farming operations commenced under Street's careful supervision in early spring of 1835, but Street departed within a month for Rock Island, arriving there around April 1, 1835. In April, six pupils enrolled in the school; another three enrolled the following month. Those developments encouraged Street to inform Herring, somewhat prematurely, that the school's success was assured.<sup>13</sup> Herring remained reserved in his judgments. He was discouraged by the slow progress and meagre enrollment, and failed to discern the reasons for Street's unbounded optimism. Herring wrote Taylor in September, 1835, advising him that unless the number of pupils increased, the teacher's pay would be reduced proportionately.<sup>14</sup> Herring acknowledged the formidable obstacles confronting the school and retarding its growth, he noted

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<sup>12</sup>Ida M. Street, "A Chapter of Indian History," Annals of Iowa, Third Series, III (1897-1899), p. 619.

<sup>13</sup>Mahan, op. cit., p. 214.

<sup>14</sup>Herring to Taylor, September 5, 1835; M21, Roll 17, pp. 51-54.



that detractors sought to thwart the school's infant success. He instructed Taylor to inform any detractors that "...the attainment of these objects is utterly impossible," meaning that the school would flourish in spite of adverse criticism.<sup>15</sup>

In February, 1837, Wisconsin Territorial Governor Henry Dodge (of the lead mines confrontation of 1827-1828) visited the school and was favorably impressed with its operation. Street's son Thomas, who accompanied Dodge on his inspection, wrote his father at Rock Island, apprising the elder Street of Dodge's favorable reaction:

Gov. D. expressed much satisfaction at the manner in which the School & Farm were conducted, & told Mr. Lowry that so far as his influence extended, he would sustain the establishment notwithstanding the exertions he knew were making it put it down.<sup>16</sup>

Dodge was seemingly aware, much as was Taylor, of opposition aligned against the school. More significantly, Dodge realized Street's influence was crucial to the school's success. Dodge allowed Street to return to Prairie du Chien, if Street so desired. Dodge said: "I have left it to his discretion to come back now or in the spring, or remain where he now is

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<sup>15</sup>Herring to Taylor, September 5, 1835; M21, Roll 17, pp. 51-54.

<sup>16</sup>Thomas Street to Joseph Street, February 16, 1837; Joseph Montfort Street Letterbook, held by the Iowa State Department of History and Archives, Des Moines, Iowa, p. 82. (Hereinafter referred to as Letterbook.)

as it may suit his convenience."<sup>17</sup> Street quickly returned to Prairie du Chien. Two months after Dodge's February visit to the school, Street was again living at Prairie du Chien. Street busied himself with improving and sustaining the school. He concentrated on increasing the enrollment which had grown slowly in his absence because of the Indian's migratory life-style, American Fur Company opposition to the school's advancement, and the regrettable lack of an Indian agent overseer to guide the school's progress. Taylor, as commandant of Fort Crawford, had been responsible for the school's operation, but military obligations understandably occupied much of his time. Street's efforts resulted in a near doubling of the enrollment to forty-one pupils, fifteen boys and twenty-six girls.<sup>18</sup> Farming operations expanded under Street's tutelage; about 150 acres were broken up, and more Indians settled near the school.<sup>19</sup> Over one-fourth of the pupils enrolled boarded at the school, while the remainder lived with their families near the school. The school provided some rations of pork, salt, and meat, plus clothing for each student as it was needed.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Thomas Street to Joseph Street, February 16, 1837; Letterbook, p. 82.

<sup>18</sup>Street to Harris, October 21, 1837; M234, Roll 729.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Mahan, loc. cit.

Increased attendance resulted in additions to the teacher's staff. Bradford and Patsey Porter of Kentucky were appointed as assistants to Lowry. Their salary, identical to that of Lowry's wife, Mary Ann, was \$300 per annum.<sup>21</sup>

By October 1837, the school faced bright prospects. Enrollment had increased substantially and Street believed the Winnebago could learn farming techniques and eventually adopt an agricultural way of life. The farm had improved greatly--more land was put under cultivation, and whiskey had been kept from Indians living on, and near, the farm.<sup>22</sup> Street said that "...at the present school & Farm, Mr. Lowry touches not a single drop-and no intoxicating drink is permitted to come on the farm."<sup>23</sup>

However, a treaty negotiated with the Sac and Fox in September, 1837, affected the school's future. By the treaty's provisions, the Sac and Fox ceded a long, tapering area of land west of the Black Hawk Purchase of 1833;<sup>24</sup> nearly one and a quarter million acres were sold to the United States for \$377,000.<sup>25</sup> The land cession necessitated the

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<sup>21</sup>Mahan, op. cit., 214-215.

<sup>22</sup>Street to Harris, October 21, 1837; M234, Roll 729.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>William J. Peterson, The Story of Iowa, I (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1952), pp. 143-146.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

establishment of a new Sac and Fox agency west of the cession region. Street was appointed its agent, and in January, 1838, journeyed to the Des Moines River to select an agency site.<sup>26</sup> Street's supervision of the school ceased then, but he preserved a keen interest in its operation until his death in May, 1840. After Street's departure from Prairie du Chien, the school continued to flourish for a time. It reached its peak enrollment in 1839; seventy-nine students, forty-three boys and thirty-six girls, were enrolled.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, success was short-lived. On October 1, 1840, the War Department ordered all teachers that due to declining enrollment, their services were no longer needed, and the school closed.<sup>28</sup>

The school failed for a combination of reasons; falling enrollment, Street's absence, American Fur Company opposition, and a lack of interest on the part of acting Indian agents assigned to Prairie du Chien after Street's transfer. Street wrote in October, 1837: "Lowry has experienced a continued series of difficulties from the failure on the part of acting agents to pay attention to the progress of the

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<sup>26</sup>Street to Harris, January 9, 1838; M234, Roll 730.

<sup>27</sup>Mahan, op. cit., p. 216.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

School or farm."<sup>29</sup> Those factors combined to undermine the school's viability. Street never knew of its failure-he died in May, 1840, five months before its closing.

Failure of the school rested, at least in part, upon American Fur Company opposition. The Company feared Indians educated at the school would become sedentary and agricultural, and destroy the fur trade. Father Mazzuchelli acted as the Company's most ardent detractor of the school. Efforts to hobble the school's operation stimulated Street's anti-Company sentiment to new heights. An incident which took place in March, 1835, prior to Street's arrival at Rock Island, fanned his intense animosity towards the American Fur Company.

On March 26, 1835, Hercules Dousman renewed his efforts to eliminate Street. In a letter to Commissioner of Indian Affairs Elbert Herring, Dousman, who claimed to be speaking on behalf of disgruntled Winnebago at Prairie du Chien, alleged that the blacksmith hired to work exclusively for the Winnebago (as per 1832 treaty provisions), in reality worked for himself on non-Indian jobs. The blacksmith supposedly closed his shop to do work for inhabitants of Prairie du Chien. Further, the blacksmith was said to have labored at least two months on the Winnebago school during

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<sup>29</sup>Street to Harris, October 21, 1827; M234, Roll 729.

the summer of 1834.<sup>30</sup> Dousman laid blame for the alleged misconduct on Street. As agent, Street should have prevented the blacksmith from performing jobs other than those specifically done for Winnebago tribe members. Dousman lamented that his earlier complaints against Street had availed him nothing, and expected the same result:

...it appears to me from what I have seen, to be almost a useless task to charge malpractice to any person connected with the Indian Department, yet I am constrained to call your attention of some of the affairs at this place.<sup>31</sup>

To substantiate his charges, Dousman provided three affidavits of men attesting to the validity of Dousman's charges. Those sworn statements were witnessed and verified by the Justice of the Peace at Prairie du Chien, none other than Hercules Dousman, a point which rendered their value as legitimate testimony suspect because of Dousman's role in bringing the charges to light in the first place.<sup>32</sup>

The War Department received Dousman's charges on May 6, 1835.<sup>33</sup> The Department ordered an investigation and directed Zachary Taylor to supervise it. Following an investigation, Taylor reported to Clark in July, 1835, that he believed Street to be guilty neither of impropriety nor

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<sup>30</sup>Hercules Dousman to Herring, March 26, 1835; Letterbook, p. 55.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Kurtz to Dousman, May 6, 1835; M21, Roll 16, p. 47.

neglect of duty.<sup>34</sup> Work on the Winnebago school, a school built at the instigation of Congress, benefitted the Winnebago as a whole and did not conflict with the blacksmith's other duties. Taylor stated that the disputed work done for Prairie du Chien residents was done only during slack periods when no jobs existed for the blacksmith or when materials were unavailable for those tasks. The blacksmith used his own tools and materials, not those supplied by the government, for all non-Indian projects.<sup>35</sup> Taylor reported he personally found the blacksmith's shop open at all times he passed through Prairie du Chien, and found "...the smith ready & willing to perform work that might be required of him for the Indians at any moment."<sup>36</sup> In response to the charges, Taylor questioned Dousman's motives in bringing them against Street. It was suspicious, Taylor reasoned, that if the Indians were as upset over the problem as Dousman stated they were, they would delay nearly six months before filing a complaint. Taylor believed the Indians would have complained much sooner, had the problem actually existed. When they did finally complain, they were "...induced to do so, by promises, and giving them ardent spirits."<sup>37</sup> Taylor roundly

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<sup>34</sup>Taylor to Clark, July 2, 1835; M234, Roll 697.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

condemned Dousman and American Fur Company meddlings in Indian affairs. War Department inactivity further irritated Taylor, prompting him to remark that should the Department not see fit to combat Company excesses and designs:

I would prefer being relieved at once from that duty, and would recommend that the Agency be turned over to the agents of said company who appear to consider...everything connected with the Department as measurably belonging to them.<sup>38</sup>

Taylor's report, joined by Street's denunciation of all charges, joined together to discredit Dousman's charges.<sup>39</sup> Clark supported Taylor's conclusions that the charges against Street were unfounded and unjust, affirming Taylor's observations that Street was a well-qualified agent and a man of considerable moral character.<sup>40</sup>

Dousman's second attempt to discredit Street failed. Street became even less restrained in his vociferous denunciations of the Company and its exploitation of the Indians. In November, 1836, Street wrote that "...The traders look at the Ind. annuities as belonging to them and make all their calculations accordingly, with much more certainty than a merchant can count his customers."<sup>41</sup> In a letter to

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<sup>38</sup>Taylor to Clark, July 2, 1835; M234, Roll 697.

<sup>39</sup>Mahan, op. cit., p. 208.

<sup>40</sup>Clark to Herring, August 27, 1835; M234, Roll 697.

<sup>41</sup>Street to Brother, November 7, 1836; Letterbook, p. 57.



Commissioner of Indian Affairs Carey A. Harris (who served in that post from July 4, 1836 to October 22, 1838), Street stated:

I am grieved to see the individuals who have come on with these seemingly devoted Indians. Heartless traders who look only to the Indians as a means of putting their hands in the Treasury... and their conductors & friends, who accompanied them...looking to the treaty a lone as a means of giving them some money, or cutting out some situation for their support of the Indians.<sup>42</sup>

Street blasted traders who sold Indians whiskey, predicting doom if whiskey-sellers were not halted. Street cited his influence in restraining the whiskey trade, an influence curtailed by his transfer to Rock Island in 1834:

So that since I left there Indians they have become drunken & are getting debased, and if something is not done to stop the current of ardent spirits pouring upon them...their ruin and indeed annihilation is not far distant.<sup>43</sup>

Street intimated that unless all Winnebago finally removed west of the Mississippi, they would be beyond any governmental help. Street had previously made that point in conjunction with trader interest in removal, and Street's applied efforts to implement removal:

Since 1833, the Sec of War [Cass], acting under the influence of Rolette, Dousman, and their friends, has so completely thwarted my benevolent plans for the benefit of the Indians, and hampered me with

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<sup>42</sup>Street to Harris, October 21, 1837; M234, Roll 729.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

petty complaints, and the suspension of amounts for singular and annual reasons, that they have, with occurrences in my own family, pecuniarily embarrassed me.<sup>44</sup>

Street continued to support removal after his agency shift to Rock Island in early 1835. Indian-white conflicts and fur trader's commercial subjugation of the Indians lent support to a removal program which prevented Indian exposure to the less desirable facets of white society. Traders could logically follow Indians west, but the Indian movement west of the Mississippi would upset established trade patterns, routes, and trading houses, all of which would cause the trader additional labor and expense in following the Indian trade. By aiding the Indians to slowly adopt elements of white society in a controlled environment which stressed education and farming, they would ideally become sedentary and merge with the mainstream of society. Herring shared Street's point of view. He elaborated on that viewpoint in a letter to Street dated June 16, 1835. For the Indians, he stated:

...there is nothing strange (as they seem to think there is) in the increasing population and prosperity of the white people; that it is owing to their love of peace and industriousness and normal habits, that every one attends to his own particular business, as a Mechanic, or Farmer, or Merchant, or a

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<sup>44</sup> Street to Brother, November 7, 1836; Letterbook, p. 57.

professional man. And that if their people will follow the same course, the same benefits will attend them.<sup>45</sup>

Herring's overly simplistic statement stressed white society's advantages for the Indian in a grandiose and somewhat theoretical manner. Street agreed the Indians could profit tremendously by adopting positive aspects of white culture such as farming and education, but believed satisfactory completion of those ends were best accomplished by removing the Indian population.

With that in mind, Street suggested to Congressman George W. Jones in January, 1836, the removal of the Rock Island agency to some point farther west of the Mississippi. Street's appraisal of the Des Moines River area was a favorable one. If the agency was located there, the Indians attached to it would cross no white lands to reach it, and it would be well within the confines of Indian lands.<sup>46</sup> Jones concurred with Street's recommendation. Jones cited the Indian's hardship in traveling to either Prairie du Chien or Rock Island. Crossing white-held lands was a troublesome point, as the Indians often fed themselves "...at the expense of the farmers of the country."<sup>47</sup> Clark supported the agency

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<sup>45</sup>Herring to Street, June 16, 1835; M21, Roll 16, pp. 208-211.

<sup>46</sup>Street to George Jones, January 25, 1836; Letter-book, p. 71.

<sup>47</sup>Jones to Harris, February 16, 1836; M234, Roll 729.

change, too. Clark wrote Herring on May 26, 1836, that the sooner the proposed change took place "...the less danger will there be of a collision between them and the settlers on the Mississippi."<sup>48</sup>

To institute the proposed agency transfer, the government negotiated a treaty in September, 1836, with the Sac and Fox who gave up their remaining lands in southeastern Iowa in return for lands situated on the Des Moines. At that time, discussion was under way, exploring the possible acquisition of all Indian lands on the Des Moines. The discussions transpired well before the agency was established; Commissioner of Indian Affairs Carey A. Harris wrote Secretary of War Benjamin Butler on January 9, 1837, suggesting the purchase of Sac and Fox territory on the Des Moines in exchange for lands south of the Missouri River. Removal stimulated the discussions, but Harris revealed another motive which represented an economic influence: "The Country yet claimed by them, says the Governor of Wisconsin, is not surpassed in the United States or Territory, and contains upwards of 10 million acres."<sup>49</sup> The American Fur Company opposed the purchase, Harris stated, because of the difficulties traders encountered in following the Indian bands

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<sup>48</sup>Clark to Herring, May 26, 1836; M234, Roll 729.

<sup>49</sup>Harris to Benjamin Butler, January 9, 1837; M21, Roll 20, pp. 402-404.

to the Des Moines and "...the members of the American Fur Company find it much more profitable to keep the Sac and Fox located near them."<sup>50</sup> By the Company's thinking, the Mississippi's east side was the ideal placement for Indians inhabiting the upper Mississippi River valley.

Sac and Fox removal was eventually completed, but not until after Street's death in 1840. Street entertained no ideas similar to Harris' proposal of April, 1837, but rather busied himself with garnering support for the Sac and Fox agency. Street's request to be allowed to remain agent for the Sac and Fox was approved by the War Department. He believed that his qualifications as an Indian agent were unmatched by anyone:

You know my influence with the Sac & Foxes, and I feel confident that no person has a greater influence than I have with the Winneabagoes [sic] of the Mississippi: & the lower Wisconsin and my knowledge of the Sac & Foxes and Winneabagoes [sic] their situation & their country is inferior to no man in this section of the country.<sup>51</sup>

Street's self-esteem bordered on arrogance at times. He firmly believed that his grasp of Indian affairs was second to none on the frontier. Street grounded his self-confidence

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<sup>50</sup>Harris to Benjamin Butler, January 9, 1837; M21, Roll 20, pp. 402-404.

<sup>51</sup>Street to Henry Dodge, May 18, 1837; John Peter Bloom (editor and compiler), The Territorial Papers of the United States, XXVII (Washington: National Archives, 1969), p. 790. (Hereinafter referred to as Papers.)

in his triumphs in endeavors like the Winnebago school and his refutation of both sets of Dousman's charges. Those two examples in particular convinced Street that he exercised a unique mastery of Indian affairs which permitted him wide latitude in dealing with any Indian problem.

One interesting Indian problem arose while Street was assigned to Rock Island. Annuity payments were treaty provisions which gave Indians stipulated quantities of goods or amounts of money (or both) annually. In return, the Indians made certain concessions, usually land cessions. Disagreement flared among the Sac and Fox in January, 1838, relative to the method of annuity payments. A number of Sac and Fox had petitioned Congress in January, 1835, asking that payments be made to heads of households or individuals, rather than chiefs. They complained that the annuities were not divided equally, and the annuity procedures were too cumbersome.<sup>52</sup> Signed by 308 braves, the petition protested annuity payments made directly to chiefs, especially Keokuk, who turned the payment over to the American Fur Company for incurred debts.<sup>53</sup> At first, Street acted in the role as arbitrator, since his official powers endowed him with control over disbursement of the annuities, but not the expenditure.

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<sup>52</sup>House Document No. 63; 23rd Cong., 2d Sess.; M234, Roll 729.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

It agitated Street, however, that most annuities went directly into Company coffers to satisfy substantial Indian debts. Lieutenant John Beach, an officer stationed at Fort Crawford (and Street's future son-in-law as well as successor as agent), informed Herring that the Indians desired cash annuities paid in specie to meet Company debts, but "...the money merely passes through the hands of the Indians into those of the traders or Fur Company."<sup>54</sup> Street worried lest tribal resentment be vented in inter-tribal rivalries, or find expression in hostilities perpetrated against whites.

Street reported the dispute's settlement in June, 1836. A council of Sac and Fox decided to retain the much-used, standard method of payments made to chiefs.<sup>55</sup> The Sac and Fox told Clark (through Street) on August 15, 1836:

It is the wish of the Sac & Foxes to have their annuities for 1837, paid in money to their chiefs. In a full council of the Chiefs and head men of the Sac & Foxes we came to this resolve...<sup>56</sup> We have made no change, and we now say the same.

Settlement features reflected only the interests of Indian leaders. Disagreement over annuity payments continued to cause trouble within the Sac and Fox confederation. Clark

<sup>54</sup>John Beach to Herring, July 25, 1835; M234, Roll 729.

<sup>55</sup>Street to Clark, June 12, 1836; M234, Roll 729.

<sup>56</sup>Sac & Fox to Clark, August 15, 1836; M234, Roll 729.

reported to Harris in December, 1836, that a band of dissidents visited him in St. Louis. They requested permission to travel to Washington to personally present a detailed description of the annuities problem, but Clark refused them that permission.<sup>57</sup> They told Clark of one Sac and Fox band which received no annuities; others were allotted but a fraction of the correct amount. Clark said: "There appears to me nothing more than strict justice in allowing them in future a proportionate share of all annuities payable to the nation at large."<sup>58</sup> In June, 1837, a group of Sac and Fox informed Street that they had received none of the year's allotted annuity payment. Street promised to secure their money. To fulfill his commitment, Street personally led a party of Sac and Fox downriver to St. Louis to place their predicament before Clark. Street told the Sac and Fox at St. Louis: "Since I came amongst you I have ever endeavored to consult your wishes in the payment of your money, and this has now induced me to accompany you to this place."<sup>59</sup> When the Indians had presented their case to Clark, Street urged them to return home and remain peaceful. Official reaction to Street's St. Louis expedition stemmed from Harris

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<sup>57</sup>Clark to Harris, December 31, 1836; M234, Roll 729.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Street to Harris, June 26, 1837; M234, Roll 729.



the following month. Harris incredulously told Street that he could hardly believe Street had allowed the Indians to travel 300 miles to St. Louis, let alone accompany them there.<sup>60</sup> Harris deplored the trip's cost, and warned Street that he left himself open for a salary suspension by his unauthorized absence from Rock Island, although no action was taken.<sup>61</sup> No concrete, permanent settlement was forthcoming to correct the annuities controversy, and Street therefore elected to dramatically draw the matter to official attention. While he definitely succeeded in publicizing the point, no policy alteration occurred in the payment method. Street believed that the St. Louis expedition endeared him to the Sac and Fox as a trusted white man, intent upon aiding the Indians, but above all else, keeping his word when it was once given:

For these Indians appear greatly attached to me...I feel confident that the S. & F. would even submit to have an amount equal to my salary paid me out of their annuities, sooner that I should leave them.<sup>62</sup>

The St. Louis venture was not without official repercussions. In August, 1837, Henry Dodge ordered Street to

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<sup>60</sup>Harris to Street, July 17, 1837; M21, Roll 22, pp. 117-120.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Street to Brother, November 7, 1837; Letterbook, p. 57.

take a Sac and Fox deputation, consisting of such notables as Black Hawk, Keokuk, Poweshiek, and Appanoose, to Washington by October 1, 1837.<sup>63</sup> Ostensibly, the trip was designed to secure peace between dissident Sac and Fox and Sioux tribes in Iowa, but the discussion of annuities was also to be held. The government felt the need to impress the Indians with the power of the United States to alleviate any nascent, hostile sentiment towards the country. Harris suggested that Street and his Indian charges visit Boston's Navy yard, arsenals, armories, fortifications, "manufactories", and other public works. Those examples would "...give them an idea of the skills and ingenuity of our people."<sup>64</sup> The party of twenty-six chiefs and braves, five women, three children, two interpreters, and a physician were, by Harris' order, to be taken to "...places of amusement as will gratify them and afford the largest number of our citizens opportunities to see them."<sup>66</sup> Street's trip, which included other Eastern cities like Boston and Philadelphia, acted as a pacification device to quiet Indian unrest.

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<sup>63</sup>Dodge to Street, August 8, 1837; M234, Roll 729.

<sup>64</sup>Harris to Street, October 21, 1837; M21, Roll 22, p. 451.

<sup>65</sup>Street to Harris, September 30, 1837; M234, Roll 729.

<sup>66</sup>Harris to Street, October 21, 1837; M21, Roll 22, p. 451.

Street had influenced the decision which led to the Washington visit. Harris revealed that in a letter to Street in October, 1837, while Street was in the company of the Sac and Fox deputation. Harris asked Street's opinion of several proposed changes in the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The proposal of primary importance regarded the payment of annuities exclusively in goods rather than any part in specie.<sup>67</sup> The government altered the annuities structure in 1839 to permit payments in goods. Street, acutely aware of the drawbacks associated with specie payments, had urged the change in January, 1835. He painted a grotesque picture of Indian excesses which occurred at annuity payments: "At every payment of Specie Annuity at Fort Winnebago, the most shameful scenes of drunkenness & murders among the Indians take place."<sup>68</sup> Annuities paid in goods would inhibit the flow of whiskey to the Indians--proper food, clothing, and related goods would be dispensed, thereby assuring the Indians would not squander cash on non-essentials like liquor.

Ground-breaking commenced at the Des Moines agency in January, 1838. Street's tenure at Rock Island was marked by a preoccupation with the Winnebago school because of the

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<sup>67</sup>Harris to Street, October 30, 1837; M21, Roll 22, p. 480.

<sup>68</sup>Street to Dodge, January 11, 1837; Letterbook, p. 58.

importance Street attached to Indian education. One notable element apparent at Prairie du Chien, but strangely absent at Rock Island, was a continuance of the Street-American Fur Company friction. Street continued his criticism of the Company. His criticism remained as virulent, but certainly less frequent. Street's assumption at his transfer to Rock Island, namely that his move was Company inspired, seemed to have some foundation in truth. His residence at out-of-the-way Rock Island rendered him impotent to combat Company excesses at Prairie du Chien, although his authority and responsibility embraced that place. Overt conflicts between Street and the Company subsided. Street reached the realization that his escape from innocuous Rock Island could be accomplished by an agency transfer to the Des Moines River region. He backed that transfer, beginning in 1836, arguing in support of the move that it would reduce Indian-white frictions, promote removal, and prevent Company abuses of the Indians. Behind his official reasoning, Street believed the Sac and Fox transfer would place him in a more active and relevant position such as he had occupied at Prairie du Chien. With those considerations in mind, the agency's transfer became a reality, and Street repaired to the Des Moines River agency (called Agency, and later Agency City), in January, 1838.

## CHAPTER VI

### AGENCY, 1838-1840

Street arrived at Agency in January, 1838. As for the location and numbers of the Sac and Fox at the agency, Street reported (in 1839) that the Indians were located in scattered areas, and in groups of varying sizes. The Sac and Fox totaled about 4546 Indians in all, divided into five bands. Three of those bands, under Wapello, Appanoose, and Keokuk were on the Des Moines River, a division of Wapello's band was on the Skunk River, and Poweshiek's band was one hundred miles away on the Ioway River.<sup>1</sup> On January 9, 1838, Street reported to Commissioner of Indian Affairs Carey A. Harris the estimated costs of breaking up prairie lands for an agency farm. Street pegged the cost at \$10,576 to break and fence 1248 acres, compared to a cost of \$12,480 for the same work in adjoining country. The difference in cost, and resultant savings, Street declared, would arise from his shrewd bargaining powers and extensive experience in the region.<sup>2</sup> Street urged the restriction of "objectionable

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<sup>1</sup>William J. Peterson, The Story of Iowa, I (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1952), p. 156.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph M. Street to Carey A. Harris, January 9, 1838; Bureau of Indian Affairs; Letters Received, 1824-1881; National Archives, Record Group 75; Series M234, Roll 730. (Hereinafter referred to as M234.)

society" from working on the farm, thereby hoping to screen undesirable white workers from employment at the agency, and exclude those whites with "objectionable habits", the worst of which was whiskey drinking. Street wrote Harris that:

...I would consider it of first importance and immorality; so as to set before the Indians examples of strict temperance and morality, at the same time as we are placing before them improved plans of agriculture and domestic economy.<sup>3</sup>

Street's desire to prevent liquor importation to the agency exemplified his firm conviction that Indian removal from close contact with undesirable characteristics of white society, in this case liquor, would result in Indian improvement and civilization. Street deplored whiskey and its disastrous effect upon the Indians. Street's "dry" attitude was enhanced by an incident which occurred in February, 1838. A party of Sac and Fox, imbibing at a store situated on the prairie some forty miles west of Rock Island, became drunk, breaking windows and damaging merchandise. In an attempt to quell the disturbance, Ross, the proprietor, engaged in a scuffling match with one Indian in the store's yard. Ross knocked the Indian, identified as Little Bear, to the ground and "...took a fence rail and struck him on the head as he lay, breaking his skull shockingly."<sup>4</sup> The

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<sup>3</sup>Street to Harris, January 9, 1838; M234, Roll 730.

<sup>4</sup>Street to Henry Dodge, February 3, 1838; M234, Roll 730.

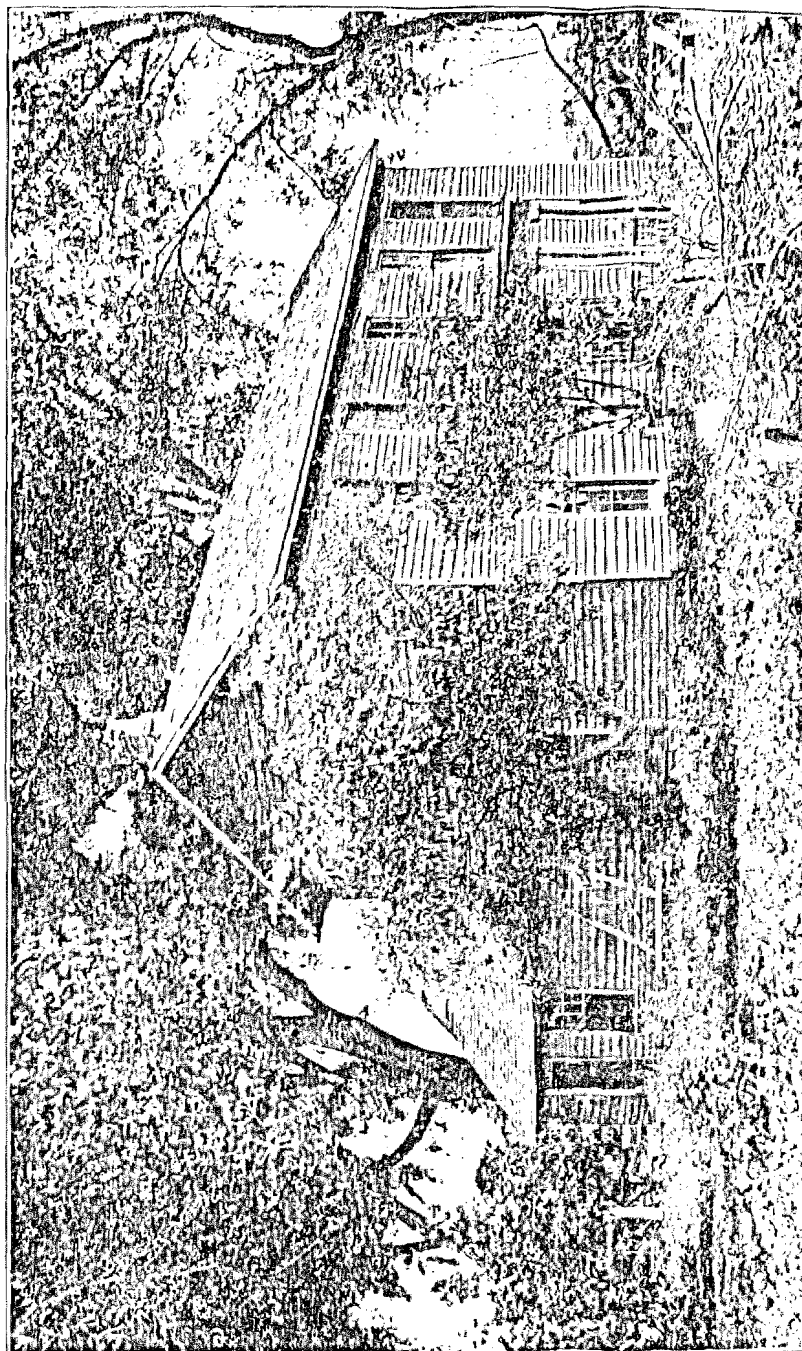


Figure 5. Agency House; Agency, Iowa.

Reprinted from the Annals of Iowa, Third Series, Vol. II, p. 115.

Ross incident dramatically strengthened Street's wish for a speedy completion of the agency and Indian removal to it.

Street experienced further anxiety over a small band of dissident Sac and Fox, fearing they would hamper his efforts at the Indian agency. A small party of what Street labeled as "renegade" Sac and Fox had left the main tribe and gone off with several white men who exhibited the Indians throughout the United States as a traveling show.<sup>5</sup> For publicity purposes, the whites intended taking the Indians to Washington "...as an injured people seeking redress from the government."<sup>6</sup> Street was anxious to assure the government that the dissidents were not representative of the Sac and Fox nation as a whole. A treaty ratified in September, 1837, had provided for Sac and Fox land cessions west of the Black Hawk Purchase area of 1832 in exchange for lands situated on the Des Moines River, and was viewed with favor by both parties. Those lands on the Des Moines became the site of the Indian agency established by Street in early 1838, and was compatible with Sac and Fox wishes to relocate on that river. Street worried lest unfounded complaints by such Indian dissidents generate unsympathetic attitudes towards the Sac and Fox and impair the fledgling agency.<sup>7</sup> Street

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<sup>5</sup>Street to Harris, February 12, 1838; M234, Roll 730.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.



wrote Wisconsin Territorial Governor Henry Dodge: "The party gone on are low worthless Indians worked upon by the cupidity of white-men who hope to make money by showing them in the towns and villages...making any story they chose [sic]."<sup>8</sup> The Ross trading store incident prompted Harris to write Street in March, 1838, urging that Sac and Fox removal to the agency proceed as rapidly as possible;

Every circumstance indicates that the Indians cannot remain in their present country with comfort or prosperity, after the settlements of the whites shall have multiplied among them.<sup>9</sup>

The new country on the Des Moines was itself being pressed by white settlements. Street reported to Dodge several months after Harris' March letter, that the Indians were sorely in need of food supplies since "The game has left the country as the pressure of the whites is great even to within 8 or 10 miles of the Indian towns."<sup>10</sup> Dodge ordered Street to let contracts for the construction of agency buildings, but cautioned that the building's should not exceed Street's initial cost estimate of \$3500.<sup>11</sup> Land breaking and

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<sup>8</sup>Street to Dodge, February 14, 1838; M234, Roll 730.

<sup>9</sup>Harris to Street, March 10, 1838; Joseph Montfort Street Letterbook, held by the Iowa State Department of History and Archives, Des Moines, Iowa, p. 87. (Hereinafter referred to as Letterbook.)

<sup>10</sup>Street to Dodge, July 13, 1838; Letterbook, p. 152.

<sup>11</sup>Harris to Street, March 10, 1838; Letterbook, p. 87.

construction of two mills was also authorized.<sup>12</sup>

Locating the new agency presented a special problem for Street. Commissioner Harris suggested it be located at least ten miles west of the eastern boundary of Indian land, but Street objected. Street argued it would most advantageously be situated on a navigable river in the area, either the Ioway, Cedar, or Des Moines.<sup>13</sup> Street advocated a river location to facilitate steamboat transportation and supply delivery. Food supplies were essential, Street insisted, as only preliminary building and land breaking would be accomplished the first year of the agency's existence. Little in the way of crops could be planted as the farm was as yet unsuitable for planting crops. Therefore, Indian bands at the agency would rely on government foodstuffs to survive the agency's first winter.<sup>14</sup> Eventually, the agency was located on a prairie four miles northeast of the Des Moines River, and about seventy-five or eighty miles west of Burlington, well within Indian country boundaries.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, that

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<sup>12</sup>Harris to Street, April 7, 1838; Bureau of Indian Affairs; Letters Sent, 1824-1881; National Archives, Record Group 75; Series M21, Roll 23, pp. 524-526. (Hereinafter referred to as M21.)

<sup>13</sup>Street to Harris, April 7, 1838; John Porter Bloom (editor and compiler), The Territorial Papers of the United States, XXVII (Washington: National Archives, 1969), p. 972. (Hereinafter referred to as Papers.)

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Street to Dodge, July 13, 1838; Letterbook, p. 152.

placement did not rectify supply problems. Street informed Harris in May, 1838, that requisitioned supplies had not arrived to feed Sac and Fox Indians who had begun to drift in to the agency.<sup>16</sup> The undelivered food supplies stipulated by 1837 treaty provisions, caused Street great anxiety. He wrote Dodge of the Indian's Plight: "Two thirds of their number are living upon roots obtained in the Prairies."<sup>17</sup> On account of the supply shortage, Street procured some flour and pork, and sent the Indians about \$400 worth of beef cattle on the hoof. Street told Dodge he bought the Indians supplies not only because the government failed to provide them, but also to prevent "...their Indians meddling with the stock of numerous settlers that are filling up the country almost to the Ind. towns."<sup>18</sup> The supply problem was not solved until the late summer of 1838 when adequate supplies began to arrive.

Street envisioned additional hardships in the construction of agency buildings. Advertisements for letting construction contracts for agency buildings appeared in two newspapers, the Missouri Republican and the Burlington Territorial

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<sup>16</sup>Street to Harris, May 26, 1838; M234, Roll 730.

<sup>17</sup>Street to Dodge, July 13, 1838; Letterbook, p. 152.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

Gazette, during the first week of June, 1838.<sup>19</sup> Street feared little response to the advertisements. Recent canal and road building booms had seized Illinois, employing many regional construction concerns. Besides that fact, few firms sought contracts which would compel them to travel far out onto relatively unsettled prairie lands in order to construct agency buildings. Last, governmental construction payments were made to the contractor only after the contracted work was completely finished, as opposed to the more desirable and lucrative installment payments common to most other types of construction.<sup>20</sup> Street remarked: "I am now apprehensive there will be no bid."<sup>21</sup>

Delays in supply, communication, and construction frustrated Street. He relayed his anxiety to Harris in July, 1838, complaining that repeated delays, affecting every phase of the agency's growth, would dishearten the Sac and Fox.<sup>22</sup> Street stated that competent management (namely himself) was absolutely essential to the agency's ultimate success, although he discovered the implementation of Indian agriculture a formidable task because the Indians were

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<sup>19</sup>Copy of Advertisements for Missouri Republican and Burlington Territorial Gazette, May 4, 1838; M234, Roll 730.

<sup>20</sup>Street to Harris, May 26, 1838; M234, Roll 730.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup>Street to Harris, July 27, 1838; M234, Roll 730.

unaccustomed to systematic and sustained manual labor.<sup>23</sup>

Street felt that by showing the Indians growing crops and healthy livestock, they would observe first-hand the superiority of farming over nomadic wanderings;

If we hope to alter radically their whole character and manner of life we must place before them in bold relief, tangible objects of plain and easy comprehension, the direct benefit whereof may be felt and experienced.<sup>24</sup>

Concern for the agency's success led Street to complain of the aforementioned problems to both Harris and Dodge. Street apologized, in part, to Dodge for his repeated complaints about the agency's problems, but added:

...my great anxiety to be of service to these Indians, and if possible to reclaim & civilize them, is my only excuse. Depend on it; much of what has been expended for the intended benefit of the Indians, has been worse than thrown away, because it has gone to strengthen a deep error, that, Indians cannot be civilized.<sup>25</sup>

Street encountered difficulties of another type in late 1838 which had nothing to do with the Sac and Fox, but did relate back to his residence at Prairie du Chien from 1827 to 1834. A treaty negotiated with the Winnebago (over whom Street no longer exercised authority) in September, 1837, ceded any and all remaining tribal lands east of the

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<sup>23</sup>Peterson, op. cit., p. 157.

<sup>24</sup>Street to Harris, July 27, 1838; M234, Roll 730.

<sup>25</sup>Street to Dodge, July 16, 1838; M234, Roll 730.

Mississippi River, and forced Winnebago removal west of that river after years of hesitation and delay. To compensate the Winnebago for the ceded lands, Congress authorized a \$1,100,000 settlement paid to them. Of that sum, \$100,000 was set aside for disbursement to one-half and one-quarter breed Winnebago as settlement of their portion of the land claims east of the Mississippi.<sup>26</sup> On July 21, 1838, Secretary of War Joel Poinsett notified Simon Cameron of Pennsylvania that he had been appointed commissioner of a group charged with examining and settling all half-breed claims.<sup>27</sup> Claims made by traders against the "breed" Winnebago for incurred debts were ordered to be amicably adjudicated. The government selected Prairie du Chien as the settlement site of all claims. Cameron, betraying the trust bestowed upon him by the government, conspired with other commission members and several traders, to force the Indians to sell their land claims and then purchased those claims at bargain prices. Mixed-blood Winnebago who journeyed to Prairie du Chien to settle their claims were purposely delayed upwards of eighty days to complete a task which should have taken only two or three days.<sup>28</sup> Those

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<sup>26</sup>Ida M. Street, "The Simon Cameron Commission of 1838," Annals of Iowa, Third Series, VII (1905-1906), pp. 115-116.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Street to Major Ethan Allen Hitchcock, January 8, 1839; Papers, pp. 1127-1134.

Winnebago who remained for extended periods of time found themselves financially unable to maintain their residence at the payment site. Many of the claimants (who numbered approximately one hundred) became deeply indebted to traders who sold them supplies at exorbitant prices; payment for purchased goods was supposedly to come from claims settlements. Many Winnebago sold their claims, at sharply discounted prices, to commission members and traders to satisfy their debts. Cameron, in particular, bought up substantial quantities of depreciated claims, fully intending to redeem them at face value later.<sup>29</sup> Some of the claims which were eventually satisfied were paid in worthless banknotes drawn on Cameron's own bank, a clever piece of chicanery which earned for him the derisive sobriquet "Great Winnebago Chief."<sup>30</sup>

Street, aware of the wholesale fraud, denounced Cameron and the other participants in the swindle. When the claims were finally to be paid, Major Eathan Allen Hitchcock, the officer supervising the claims payments, asked Street to collect the payment money in St. Louis and transfer it to Prairie du Chien, which he did.<sup>31</sup> At Prairie du Chien,

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<sup>29</sup>Street to Hitchcock, January 8, 1839; Papers, pp. 1127-1134.

<sup>30</sup>A. H[oward] M[eneely], "Simon Cameron," DAB, III, p. 437.

<sup>31</sup>Street, "The Simon Cameron Commission of 1838," pp. 119-121.

Street resisted pressure from American Fur Company agent Hercules Dousman, who insisted the payment money be returned to St. Louis. By preventing the distribution of the funds to legitimate claimants Dousman believed, and correctly so, that the Indians economic situation would only worsen. As more Indians were forced to rely on credit to survive, additional land claims could be acquired for Cameron, himself, and others. Street, naturally, refused to return the money.<sup>32</sup> Street's refusal to participate in any fashion in the swindle, although the Winnebago were not his direct responsibility, drew the ire of Cameron, Dousman, and associates. Hitchcock, allied with Street, also became a target of their ill-feeling. Hitchcock wrote Street:

I have crossed the purposes of a band of greedy speculators and brought upon myself the maledictions of many who will pretend an infinite degree of sympathy for the very half-breeds whom they have cheated, and almost robbed by what will boldly be put forth as a legal proceeding.<sup>33</sup>

Hitchcock urged the payment to the original claims holders, not those who gained possession of them through fraud.<sup>34</sup> Street, too, indignantly condemned those who cheated the Indians: "To me, it seems base and unpardonable, that men

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<sup>32</sup>Street, "The Simon Cameron Commission of 1838," p. 129.

<sup>33</sup>Hitchcock to Street, November 8, 1838; M234, Roll 698.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.



chose [sic] by the President...to see justice done to the  
Inds. and to the halfbreeds, should suffer such speculation  
to go on."<sup>35</sup> Street surveyed the scope of the swindle:

From the calculations I can make from date  
here, out of 100,000\$ the half breeds got about  
32, or 35,000\$ nominally, for much was paid in  
mdg [merchandise] at high rates out of Mr.  
Lockwoods and the American Fur Companys stores.<sup>36</sup>

Street and Hitchcock corresponded frequently, discussing the  
commission and its accompanying scandal; Street roundly de-  
nounced all of the "shameful speculations." In spite of the  
extremely private and accusatory flavor of his letters,  
Street granted Hitchcock permission to utilize any part of  
those letters if Hitchcock believed some benefit would accrue  
from them:

...but if it can be in any way useful in doing good  
to the poor defrauded halfbreeds, use them all as  
you deem best for the elucidation of the subject,  
and the obtaining of Justice for the ignorant, de-  
frauded halfbreeds.<sup>37</sup>

Largely through the complaints of Hitchcock and  
Street to the War Department, a new commissioner was ap-  
pointed in January, 1839, to reinspect all half-breed  
claims.<sup>38</sup> The government ordered an investigation of the  
commission in February, 1839. Cameron and his cohorts

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<sup>35</sup>Street to Hitchcock, January 8, 1839; M234, Roll 699.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Street, "The Simon Cameron Commission of 1838," p.  
187.

defended themselves against the charges of fraud, but the investigation's findings were inconclusive.<sup>39</sup> Unsympathetic white attitudes towards the half-breed Indians contributed to the investigation's failure. The public directed scant attention towards the commission's machinations, as the Indian's fair treatment lost out to white ambivalence.

Street spent much of 1839 involved in the farm's operation and construction of sundry agency buildings. In September, 1839, Street wrote T. Hartley Crawford (the Commissioner of Indian Affairs appointed on October 22, 1838), listing buildings which had been completed. Among them were the agent's house, council house, smoke house, river warehouse, and sawmill.<sup>40</sup> Agency progress was a reality in 1839 despite Street's recurring ill-health. However, new charges threatened the agency's brief existence as Street was once again charged with misconduct in office. Those charges threatened to permanently cripple the agency's viability as a means to improve the Indian's lot.

On November 29, 1839, W. W. Chapman, Iowa's first territorial delegate to Congress, preferred charges against Street, claiming that Street withheld annuities from the Sac and Fox in 1838, and again in 1839, and paid those annuities

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<sup>39</sup>Street, "The Simon Cameron Commission of 1838," p. 183.

<sup>40</sup>Street to T. Hartley Crawford, September 14, 1839; M234, Roll 730.

to the American Fur Company.<sup>41</sup> Chapman informed Poinsett that:

Many other [incidents] of similar character has occurred and I am satisfied that Gen'l. Street will not tend his aid to any measure proposed by the government which has not a tendency to promote the interest of the Fur Company.<sup>42</sup>

Crawford apprised Street of Chapman's allegations in a letter of December 2, 1839, in which he requested Street's reply to the charges.<sup>43</sup> Street's reply was forthcoming on February 6, 1840, but he gained personal support from a variety of sources in the interim. The newspaper Burlington Hawkeye and Iowa Patriot upheld Street's integrity and honesty in his dealings with the Indians: "We have known General Street for many years, and believe him to be incapable of injuring the red men...[and] know the interest he has always manifested in behalf of the Indians."<sup>44</sup> Josiah Smart, an interpreter, presented an affidavit to the War Department in which he affirmed the propriety of Street's actions at the 1838 annuities payment. The arrangement concocted to give Indian annuities over to the American Fur Company was

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<sup>41</sup>Street to Joel Poinsett, November 29, 1839; Letter-book, p. 146.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Crawford to Street, December 2, 1839; M21, Roll 27, p. 412.

<sup>44</sup>"Council With the Sac and Fox in 1840," Iowa Journal of History and Politics, XV (1917), pp. 430-433.

conceived the night preceding the payment by the Company and the Indians themselves.<sup>45</sup> Smart stated:

Gen'l. Street has never since I have been with him advised or assisted the Inds. to make any arrangement with the Am. Fur Company, either for annuity purposes or any other purposes...His advise has always appeared to me to be for the benefit of the Indians exclusive of all personal interest or favour to anyone.<sup>46</sup>

W. Phelps, an American Fur Company trader, corroborated Smart's testimony and denied any Street connection with the Company.<sup>47</sup> Phelps upheld Street's actions at the 1838 annuities payment, declaring that Street disbursed all monies fairly at that time. Phelps' testimony on Street's behalf was ironic in light of Street's earlier confrontations with the Company. As Indian removal west of the Mississippi finally became reality, the move compelled the Company to follow the fur trade. That reconciled the major point of disagreement between Street and the fur traders, although Street continued to experience difficulties with whiskey peddlers. Phelps stated that Street had nothing to do with the payment in any manner as "...neither the Indians requested you to make an examination of Accounts,-nor did we

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<sup>45</sup>Josiah Smart Statement, January 9, 1840; M234, Roll 730.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>W. Phelps Statement, January 20, 1840; M234, Roll 730.

ask your aid or receive any from you."<sup>48</sup> Phelps further stated he was present at the 1839 annuity payment and personally witnessed "...the annuity paid immediately & directly into the hands of the Chiefs themselves."<sup>49</sup> Phelps denied that any Street-American Fur Company conspiracy was hatched to deceive and cheat the Sac and Fox. On the contrary, Phelps wrote to Street:

So far from doing so, it has appeared to me that you have at various times too violently opposed the Interests of our Company. I can positively state that you have never furthered or attempted to further the Ints. of our Company.<sup>50</sup>

Street responded to Chapman's charges in a letter of February 6, 1840, to Crawford in Washington. Hitchcock had already spoken to Crawford on Street's behalf in October, 1839, and told Street: "I am confident you have no occasion to give yourself a moment's concern...[as] I have never heard a single individual express a doubt of your integrity."<sup>51</sup> Street apologized to Crawford for his tardiness in replying to the charges, explaining that he had been prevented from

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<sup>48</sup>Phelps to Street, February 20, 1840; Letterbook, p. 149.

<sup>49</sup>Phelps to Street, January 20, 1840; M234, Roll 730.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Hitchcock to Street, October 17, 1839; Letterbook, p. 120.

doing so by a "...painful and protracted illness."<sup>52</sup> Street said: "I should not now in my present state approach the subject, but for the fear that my long silence might be deemed a confession of the truth of Mr. C's. charges."<sup>53</sup> Street branded the charges as ridiculous, refuting them much as Smart and Phelps had done. Street adamantly declared that annuities allocated for 1838 and 1839 were paid in full and according to established governmental procedures. The expenditure of annuities, whether to the American Fur Company or any other source, was outside his jurisdiction as an agent.<sup>54</sup> Street bitterly condemned Chapman's sketchy knowledge of Indian affairs as well as the role Street himself played in those affairs:

...his...knowledge of me and my official conduct amounts to nothing more than the picking up and stringing together a few garbled statements & reports set afloat through the Country by some disappointed creditors of the Inds.<sup>55</sup>

Street accused Chapman of being one of those "disappointed creditors" whose fraudulent claims against the Winnebago half-breeds were disallowed by the government as part of 1837 treaty provisions. Street recounted his actions when paying the Sac and Fox annuities, even going as far as to describe

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<sup>52</sup>Street to Crawford, February 6, 1840; M234, Roll 730.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

the manner in which he counted out fifty and hundred dollar bills to the chiefs.<sup>56</sup> Street summarized Chapman's charges:

Whether Mr. Chapman's private opinion of me and my conduct be favorable or not, is a matter of indifference. His gratuitous & malicious attempt to injure me by misrepresenting my conduct & endeavoring to effect my removal for a selfish purpose of his own, I disregard--His weakness I most sincerely pity--My sole object is to show the Dept. that my conduct has not been such as Mr. C...has thought proper to represent it.<sup>57</sup>

Iowa Territorial Governor Robert Lucas reviewed the evidence supporting Street. That evidence, joined by Lucas' own affirmation of Street, formed a weighty core of vindication "...which I [Lucas] consider a triumphant refutation of Mr. Chapman's charges."<sup>58</sup> Lucas transmitted the evidence to Crawford in Washington with a personal recommendation of Street:

In justice to Genl. Street I will state that as far as I have had any intercourse with him he has maintained a deep interest for the welfare of the Inds. under his charge, and a willingness at all times to use his best exertions to fulfill the instructions of the Department.<sup>59</sup>

Before Street could be officially exonerated of the charges, he suffered an apparent heart attack, so-called "apoplexy", and died on May 5, 1840, at the Des Moines River Sac and Fox

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<sup>56</sup> Street to Crawford, February 6, 1840; M234, Roll 730.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Robert Lucas to Street, February 18, 1840; Letter-book, p. 150.

<sup>59</sup> Lucas to Crawford, February 18, 1840; M234, Roll 730.

agency.

The War Department had assured Street's son Thomas in April, almost a full month before Street's death, that in the event of the elder Street's continued illness or death, a family member would be appointed to succeed him.<sup>60</sup> Accordingly, the Department appointed Street's son-in-law, Army Lieutenant John Beach, as Street's successor at his death in 1840.<sup>61</sup>

On May 16, 1840, the War Department notified Street's widow that her late husband's refutation of the Chapman charges was "perfectly satisfactory" to the Department, and officially exonerated Street of those charges.<sup>62</sup> Street's endeavors at the Sac and Fox agency met limited success. Initial construction of agency buildings was completed, but farming operations progressed more slowly as the Sac and Fox were reluctant to undertake the unaccustomed labors involved in farming. Their dislike of farming, combined with the problems encountered in establishing an agency from its initial stages, prevented Street from realizing appreciable gains for his efforts at the time of his death in 1840.

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<sup>60</sup>W. B. Lewis to Thomas P. Street, April 6, 1840; Letterbook, p. 127.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.



## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSIONS

As protector of Indian rights on the frontier, the Indian agent labored under tremendous difficulties. Laws enacted by Congress to regulate Indian affairs were, all too often, short-sighted, inequitable, or expedient statutes which were mere stop-gap measures, rather than a consistent policy. If the nebulous character of federal Indian legislation was not a sufficient stumbling block to confound every aspect of the agent's position, unsympathetic white attitudes towards the Indians were also integral features of the frontier which adversely affected the Indian agent.

In a basic sense, Indian rights and territorial sovereignty were shunted aside in the wake of American expansionism during the 1820's, 1830's, and 1840's. The headlong, frenetic pace of growing America accentuated the Indian problem significantly, and consequently the pressing question: What was to be done with the Indians? The rapidity of white expansion rendered a permanent and fair solution to the problem virtually impossible. Temporary expedients were continually embraced to deal with momentarily acute aspects of Indian relations which required some sort of immediate attention, but failed of a permanent solution. The overall effect of that catch-as-catch-can planning was confusion and bitter Indian-white antipathy which only served to further

complicate the agent's job and render inevitable the persistent and continued push of the Indian further and further westward.

Joseph Montfort Street found himself confronted by those serious obstacles. Refusing to be intimidated by the difficulties of his office, Street endeavored throughout his unusually long tenure of thirteen years as an Indian agent to fulfill his official obligations to the Indians under his authority. Through his official functions, Street attempted to stimulate Indian civilization and assimilation into the mainstream of white society as the only possible means of saving the Indians from extinction. Street's personal viewpoint ascribed to such measures. Scrupulously honest, and imbued with a compassionate appraisal of the Indian and the Indian's defensive position on the frontier, Street found his efforts to ameliorate the Indians condition blocked by white indifference or white groups which hardly held the best interests of the Indians at heart. Frontier elements of the white population such as the fur traders, miners, or squatters, believed the Indian to be a definite hindrance to settlement and expansion. As those groups felt little compassion for the Indians, they felt just as little about the Indian agent whose job it was to administer Indian affairs and protect the interests of the Indians.

Street believed that Indian removal west of the Mississippi River would allow the eventual civilization of

the Indians under his charge. However, Street discovered even his removal efforts resisted by white groups. The American Fur Company, a monopolistic enterprise which enjoyed a complete strangle hold of the fur trade and therefore the Indians, believed its commercial supremacy would be compromised by Indian removal, and ardently resisted Street's every effort to implement Indian removal. In that manner, the Company was but one representation of white attitudes which regarded the Indian only as a manipulative source to be used, or abused, to the fullest possible advantage.

Confronted by such difficulties, Street's sympathetic feeling was, with few exceptions, definitely not in tune with the bulk of prevailing white sentiments. Consequently, Street saw himself as a beleaguered champion of the Indian, perhaps even a saviour of sorts. That instilled in him a moralistic purpose which in turn stimulated a strong sense of moral self-righteousness and egotism on Street's part. In a strict sense, Street's attitude was justified. His staunch and unfaltering efforts on behalf of the Indians, in the face of overwhelming opposition, gave him a deserved basis for his feelings; Street's adherence to a benevolent, paternalistic Indian policy rendered him worthy of a considerable amount of respect.

Joseph Montfort Street can be appreciated somewhat more as a representation of the conflicts within a rapidly expanding society than merely as an individual. While his

contribution as an Indian agent was important, even that role was necessitated by a basic Indian-white conflict which repeatedly called for a mitigating force to cushion the impact of white society upon the hapless Indian, who continually suffered at the hands of white society. Street as an individual, and Street as an Indian agent, were both symbols of the clash of two totally different cultures, one white and one Indian, which could not amicably co-exist and therefore required an intermediary to deal with affairs between the two groups. As that intermediary, Street struggled to cope with a solution to the multi-faceted Indian problem, a solution which escapes us to this day.

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